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THE GYPSY LIFE OF BETSY WOOD

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The GYPSY LIFE of BETSY WOOD

By M. EILEEN LYSTER

WITH HEAD AND TAILPIECES BY
JOHN GARSIDE
AND AN INTRODUCTION BY
JOHN SAMPSON

LONDON AND TORONTO
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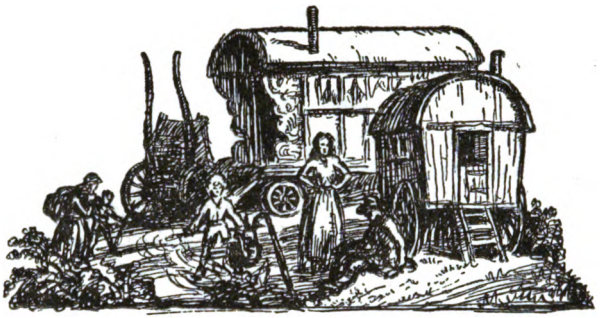

INTRODUCTION

It is now more than two centuries since the English Gypsy Abram Wood rode into Wales with his wife and family, and handed down his name to the famous clan still known as the "teulu Abram Wd." A notable chieftain this! As early as 1715, in the Parish Register of Selattyn recording the birth of his son Bohemia, he is styled a "reputed King of the Gypsies"; and he must have lived to well over a hundred years, since his death is not recorded until 1799, when he was buried in the now deserted churchyard of Llangelynin, on a lonely seashore in Merioneth. Gypsy tradition depicts him as a tall and splendid man, *kalo sar vangar* ("black as coal"), ever on horseback, and dressed after the picturesque habit of the early Gypsies, in cocked hat, green silk coat trimmed with lace, with half-crowns for buttons. His name has passed into literature. In the Welsh Interlude of Twm o'r Nant or Tom of the Dingle, known as *Pleser a Gofid* ("Pleasure and Grief"),

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one of the characters, Auntie Sal—"an old woman and her ungracefulness with her"—is a Gypsy fortune-teller, who claims kinship with Abram Wood, "her cousin who travels Wales and England." Still earlier, in that work of genius the *Bardd Cwsc*, or "Sleeping Bard" (1703), a prose allegorical narrative written by Ellis Wynne in the manner of Quevedo's visions, he twice refers to the Gypsies—a "lying tawny crew, tan-faced loons who deafen us with their gibberish." These Gypsies, thus pilloried by the one-time rector of Llandanwg, may have been an early pioneering party; and, if we may accept Twm o'r Nant's story, Abram himself, before finally adopting Wales as his home, was in the habit of crossing and recrossing the border. There is something not a little significant in the fact that his son Bohemia was born or baptised at Selattyn, a little village in Shropshire, a mile or so from the boundary of Denbigh. And doubtless the wily Romané in every land where they have sojourned have grasped the advantage of choosing a camping-place from which, when occasion arose, they might rapidly transfer themselves from one jurisdiction to another.

While all Gypsy tribes have much in common besides their blood, yet in the Romany house there are many mansions. Even among those settled for four centuries in Great Britain, we find Gypsy characteristics developed in different parts upon different lines; the Scottish Gypsy, as history and tradition tell, having early adopted the life of sturt and strife, while his English kinsfolk,

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a gay unthrifty breed, may be best likened in the words of Jasper Petulengro to the merry cuckoos, which Borrow, even in a moralising mood is bound to confess he would not wish turned into "barn-door fowls."

"We are not miserable, brother."

"Well, then, you ought to be, Jasper. Have you an inch of ground of your own? Are you of the least use? Are you not spoken ill of by everybody? What's a gypsy?"

"What's the bird noising yonder, brother?"

"The bird! Oh, that's the cuckoo tolling; but what has the cuckoo to do with the matter?"

"We'll see, brother; what's the cuckoo?"

"What is it? you know as much about it as myself, Jasper."

"Isn't it a kind of roguish, chaffing bird, brother?"

"I believe it is, Jasper."

"Nobody knows whence it comes, brother?"

"I believe not, Jasper."

"Very poor, brother, not a nest of its own?"

"So they say, Jasper."

"With every person's bad word, brother?"

"Yes, Jasper, every person is mocking it."

"Tolerably merry, brother?"

"Yes, tolerably merry, Jasper."

"Of no use at all, brother?"

"None whatever, Jasper."

"You would be glad to get rid of the cuckoos, brother?"

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"Why, not exactly, Jasper; the cuckoo is a pleasant funny bird, and its presence and voice give a great charm to the green trees and fields; no, I can't say I wish exactly to get rid of the cuckoo."

These diverse qualities of the Gypsy have doubtless their several appeal. In Scotland, personages like Jane Welsh Carlyle and others have been proud to claim relationship with the dour Scottish Gypsies; while England can boast of a learned Society founded by wise men of Gotham, with the avowed object of hedging in the cuckoo within the pages of their Journal.

But in Great Britain it is the Welsh Gypsies who have best preserved and cultivated one of the earliest and most gracious traits of the race, the love of music. The only authentic name for a Gypsy, the word *Rom*, identical with Indian *Dom*, means, if etymology may be trusted, "professional musician." And the first Gypsies of whom we read in history are the 10,000 minstrels celebrated by Firdausi in his eleventh-century epic, the *Shah Nameh*, who represents them as having been imported into Persia, at the whim of the monarch Bahram Gur, for the divertisement of his people. In all countries we find music a predominant feature of Romany genius, but in few (unless perhaps we exclude Hungary and Russia) more so than in Wales.

Among his other accomplishments Abram Wood was famed as "a sweet player on the violin," and is, indeed, said to have been the first who ever practised this art

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in Wales. From his loins has sprung a race of fiddlers and harpers, many of whom have been acclaimed masters of the national instrument. In earlier days these Gypsy harpists, the sons and grandsons of Abram, formed part of the retinue of great landed families, where, as in ancient times, the "telyniwr" sat on his dais entertaining the diners with his melodies, or inspiring the steps of the dancers. Nowadays we oftener find the Gypsy harpist following his traditional vocation in the chief hostelries of Welsh towns, or on the promenade of some gay watering-place. It is small wonder, then, that in a land of music-lovers like the Cymri, the Woods should be universally esteemed, and welcomed everywhere with cries of "Here come the Old Family!" No marauders these, to be shunned or scorned, but rather favoured guests to be honoured at every festivity. Even their chosen form of sport reflects the mild and peaceful nature of the Welsh Gypsies, for it is none other than the gentle art eulogised by Izaak Walton. And in this craft, again, they have become such experts, that for their divinatory knowledge of streams and pools, they are eagerly sought after by the brotherhood of anglers.

It is of a granddaughter of Abram Wood, celebrated in a well-known Welsh englyn, Alabaina the daughter of the harpist Valentine, that Betsy Wood is herself a grandchild. And while it is true that there are two gentile links in her ancestral chain, she re-entered the true stock when she wedded Howell Wood, grandson

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of the harpist Thomas and his spouse Silvaina, "the big woman of the powerful malediction."

It is now nearly thirty years since I first met this gifted Gypsy woman at Beaumaris, where I was struck by her high intelligence and vast store of Gypsy and gentile folk-lore. Whether she herself shared the belief in the extraordinary superstitions, which in Romani, in Welsh, or in English she would pour forth with such vividness as to thrill and astound the hearer, I never knew or sought to know. Suffice it to say that whatever drops of gentile blood ran in her veins, I have seldom encountered anyone who embodied more fully the true Gypsy spirit. She could read faces and the thoughts behind them at a glance, and had she adopted *drukeriben* as a profession like most of her Romany sisters, would certainly have excelled in the art of fortune-telling, long ago defined by old Syforella Wood as *o bita bakhtiben te dias 'men o beng* ("the little gift with which the Devil has endowed us"). It was in Betsy's later days at Earlstown and at Prestatyn that Miss Lyster, the writer of this charming memoir, became Mrs. Wood's attached friend, and winning her full confidence as few others might, secured from her this idyllic picture of a Gypsy's life.

J. S.

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THE GYPSY LIFE OF BETSY WOOD

CHAPTER I

GENESIS

An old weather-beaten farmhouse built of grey stone and perched high upon the shoulder spur of a Welsh mountain. There was no cultivated garden around it; the front door—which led directly into the low ceilinged kitchen—opened on to an enclosed patch of greyish-green turf like the surrounding hillside kept closely shorn by a flock of sheep. Standing on the threshold one looked straight across to a range of lower hills, or down into the valley far below where nestled the tiny village of Yspytty Vach, a hamlet consisting only of some threescore dwellings, two inns and a general shop, but which, nevertheless, represented the bustling world to

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the dwellers in the isolated farm. Behind the house was a large quadrangle enclosed on three sides by long low barns and farm buildings, the living-house with the dairy walling the fourth. The turf of this court was worn away by cattle and pigs, and after a shower of rain became in places a morass, impossible to cross dry-shod. Beside the house rose three large elm trees that had somehow defied the winds of many winters. Seen from the valley they presented a conspicuous landmark, and gave to the farm its name of "The House of the Three Trees."

It was almost dinner-hour on a warm sunny day in May; a noontide silence brooded over the place: there was no sound of man or beast, and a cat licking her paws and sunning herself upon the doorstep was the only visible sign of life. After the manner of farms all the windows were tightly closed but the heavy oaken door stood open.

Within the house, the maid-servant, Betsy, was busy in the huge stone-flagged kitchen. A small, slight, fragile-looking girl, she showed herself to be in reality strong and sturdy.

Only well-knit muscles could have raised the great pot of chicken food from the hob as she did and carried it unaided to the back kitchen. Leaving it there to cool, she made up the fire and was sweeping the already almost immaculate hearth, when a large sheep-dog trotted soberly through the door and nozzled against her. She stooped to caress him. "What, is it dinner-

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time already, Rover bach?" Rover lay down before the fire, his bright eyes fixed upon her, and wagged his tail in reply. He was a worker who had been out on the hills since dawn, and he was too wise to spend his brief mid-day rest in needless begging for his dinner; he knew that he would not be forgotten by his friend Betsy.

He was soon followed by his fellow-worker, a loutish, sulky-looking lad, who slouched into the kitchen, seated himself at the table, and loudly demanded his dinner. "I cannot wait for the others," he explained, "I must go to Bryn Mawr this afternoon—give me something to eat at once."

Betsy lifted a pot from the fire, ladled some of the steaming mess of crumbled oatcakes and cheese it contained into a soup plate, and set it before him.

"Brewis again!" he grumbled.

Betsy tossed her head. "If you do not like it, do not eat it."

Evan looked distastefully at his plate and answered angrily, "I do not like it, I tell you; it is brewis for dinner and brewis for supper every blessed day."

Betsy whisked away the plate. "Here, Rover, ci da, here is your dinner."

Rover arose with alacrity, wagging his tail, and buried a grateful nose in the plate of brewis.

The lad stood speechless with wrath, then aimed a kick at Rover, who saved himself by dodging behind Betsy. "You, you little ——, you have given my dinner to the dog! Here, what am I to eat?"

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"Eat? I do not know; you do not deserve anything."

Evan was just beginning a heated harangue when the door into the house opened and a comfortable-looking buxom woman, his mother and the mistress of the farm, bustled into the room.

"How now, Evan? What is the matter with him this time, Betsy vach?"

Evan vigorously explained.

"Give him some bread and cheese, Betsy; and you, Evan, do not grumble again or mayhap you go hungry. Set the table for dinner, girl; the master will be here anon."

She bustled away again and Betsy spread the cloth and put out the mugs, plates, spoons and knives, while Evan ate his bread and cheese in gloomy silence.

Presently Rover, having licked his plate clean, came with wagging tail to give thanks for his dinner, and Betsy knelt down and buried her face against the dog's neck. "You are a good boy, Rover," she murmured, "always contented and good-tempered," and she shot a glance at the still munching Evan.

"I'm sorry, Betsy," said the lad, "truly I am; there, forget and be friends again. You are going out to-night; I will walk down to the village with you."

"No, you will not," flared Betsy. "I would not walk with you — a sulky bad-tempered boy — not for a thousand pounds."

He shrugged his shoulders. "All right, spitfire, till to-morrow then; but you might just give me a kiss of forgiveness."

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Betsy stamped her foot. "Go out of my kitchen."

He hesitated and looked at her doubtfully for a moment, then, finding her implacable, whistled to Rover and went off to his work followed by the dog.

Betsy laughed softly to herself as she finished laying the table, and taking the pot of chicken food, went to the back door to feed the fowls. She stood on the door-step for a time throwing spoonfuls of food to the birds, then crossed the yard to the enclosed chicken-coops, holding her skirt high and carefully picking her steps, for she had a dainty fastidious dislike to wet or muddy feet.

A fat, rosy-cheeked girl came from the shippons, her wooden clogs coated with mud; she tramped straight through the mire and stopped to laugh at Betsy. "You are a dainty one, Betsy," said she.

Betsy joined the laugh against herself. "I hate dirt, Margot."

The girl looked at her own muddy feet and stained skirt, then, with arms akimbo and head on one side, whimsically contemplated Betsy. "You do always look nice and fresh and neat; I wish you could teach me the trick," she sighed. "Evan likes it."

Betsy laughed. "There is no trick to teach, Margot; keep away from the mud."

"And when your way lies through it?"

"Go carefully."

"I wish I could—but it is a bother when you are in a hurry; I always forget," Margot philosophised, "and

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it is not only mud, there are such a lot of things in life that I would skip over or go round if I could."

"You cannot," answered Betsy soberly. "Most things have to be gone through, and the mud, too, but we can try to choose the cleanest places. My mother used to say to me, 'I have had a hard life, girl. I have been drawn through the eye of a needle. We have to go through the world, we cannot go round it, but God is good, and the Devil himself is not so bad to those that he likes.'"

"I saw Evan go away just now in a rare bad temper; what was wrong?" said Margot.

Betsy tossed her head. "Oh, grumbling again; his dinner did not suit his lordship this time."

"Do you like him, Betsy?" asked Margot wistfully.

"I neither like nor dislike him. Why should I? He is no concern of mine."

"But you know he wants to walk out with you. He walks with me sometimes, though we all know he likes you best."

"He is the master's son and we are the servants," said Betsy soberly. "I would not encourage him if I were you, Margot."

"I do not get a chance while you are about," said Margot bitterly; then she slipped her arm through Betsy's; "but I love you all the same, Betsy dear."

"Betsy, Betsy," the farm mistress called from the house.

"It is dinner-time," said Betsy. "Come, Margot."

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Betsy's grandmother, Alabaina, had been a Gypsy, an aristocrat among wanderers, and through her she could trace her descent in the female line for five generations direct from Abram Wood, the lordly founder of the Welsh Gypsy clan. Alabaina, always mounted on a horse and clad in green velvet, had, by virtue of her awe-inspiring presence and the fear of the ignorant peasantry for her occult powers, levied toll for many years in the very neighbourhood where her granddaughter now served as maid-servant on a farm. Her memory was still feared and respected, and it threw a halo of mysterious romance around the figure of her little descendant in the eyes of Evan and her fellow-servants.

But, despite her descent, Betsy herself was altogether house-bred. Alabaina had died before her birth, which event took place in the house of her grandfather, a Welshman, who had been a rover only for the love of his Gypsy bride, and was at that time settled in Carnarvon.

On the marriage of her mother to the Welsh game-keeper, Joe Ffoulkes, when she was a child of two years, Betsy accompanied her to her new home, and there she had lived until the death of her stepfather in her twelfth year, being known by his name and treated by him as one of his own children. Indeed, she herself did not know until long after that he was not in truth her father, nor did she ever learn who was the man whom she could properly call by that name.

Upon the death of her husband, Mrs. Ffoulkes had

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moved to a cottage in Yspytty Vach where she now lived with her youngest child, a boy of ten.

During the life of her stepfather, Betsy had frequently met her Gypsy relatives, for the gamekeeper's cottage lay within the regular circuit traversed by the wandering bands. The visitor most welcomed by the little girl was her mother's uncle, the old harpist, Jeremiah Wood. He used to play tunes for his pretty little niece to dance, and she loved him as much as she hated his vigorous gauji wife who scolded and at times struck the gentle old man.

When the younger members of the clan visited them, Betsy was not so happy. Her own contemporaries teased and mocked at their house-bred cousin, holding up her gauje ways to ridicule. And even in gauje fashions, did they choose to adopt them, they bested her. Once when a large party were staying in the neighbourhood, she accompanied her mother on a visit to them one Sunday afternoon. The Gypsies were all in holiday attire. Betsy's dress was new and pretty, but to her mind, it could not be compared with her cousins' finery. The dress of one of the little girls especially took her fancy, for Maria was the proud possessor of a crinoline. Before her next visit to the camp, Betsy ingeniously twined some long sprays of bramble around the inside of her skirt in order to give it the fashionable stiffness, and she still remembered with hot shame the laughter of her cousins, old and young alike, when they discovered the reason of her disinclination to sit down.

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The family sometimes visited her mother's cottage at Yspytty Vach, but of late years Betsy had seldom met them, for since her stepfather's death she had known what it was to work for strangers. She was now on the eve of her seventeenth birthday and for the last two years had been living in, as maid-servant at the farm. The work was hard, but she was a willing worker and a general favourite, especially with the farmer's wife, who had shown no dislike to her son Evan's evident partiality for the pretty girl. He might have looked higher, but she consoled herself with the assurance that Betsy was a good girl, trained in household ways under her own eyes.

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CHAPTER II

THE FIRST MEETING

EVERY other Thursday Betsy had a free evening and went down to Yspytty Vach to visit her mother, who never failed to climb the hill to see her daughter some day during the intervening week. On these weekly meetings Betsy always received a bundle of washed and neatly mended clothes and handed over to her mother one of soiled and torn garments; for Mrs. Ffoulkes assumed complete charge of her wardrobe, considering the girl had little time to spend on its renovation. "Amuse yourself in your spare moments while you are young, child," she said when Betsy remonstrated. "I will keep you tidy." As for any new clothes, they were, of course, supplied by her mother, Betsy being penniless, as every week she passed on all that she earned to help the household in Yspytty Vach.

The day of her quarrel with Evan ended in the looked-for evening of freedom, and Betsy sang blithely as she hurried through her work, dressed herself in her best clothes and carefully avoiding her would-be swain, set out on the three-mile walk to the village.

The western sky was golden as she left the still

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sunlit hill-top and following a track over the fields ran down the grassy slopes into the shade of the valley. When, half an hour later, she reached her mother's cottage, it was shrouded in dusk, though overhead the clouds were still ruddy with the sunset glow.

She opened the door, stepped out of the gloaming into the fire-light, and was confronted by a tall broad-shouldered young man with flashing eyes and ginger-coloured hair, clad in a suit of velveteens bedecked with silver buttons, who rose to greet her from beside the hearth where he had been sitting talking to her mother.

Mrs. Ffoulkes came forward and kissed her. "Betsy, vach, I am glad to see you, indeed, and you come in good time. Howell," turning to the man, "this is my daughter, Betsy."

Somewhat to Betsy's confusion he made her a low and sweeping bow, "Sarshan, rawnee."

They were almost the only words of Romani known to Betsy, and she answered in Welsh, "I am very well, thank you, but I do not know who you are."

"He is one of your Aunt Taw's boys," her mother answered for him. "He is travelling to South Wales with two children and they have called to see me on their way down."

Betsy turned to look at the children—two little boys who were playing happily enough with her youngest brother Joe—but started back in horror when she saw their hands, for their fingers were webbed.

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"Indeed, poor children, I never saw their like," said her mother. "There is something far and strange about them, too, as if they were not of this world."

"Their father was web-handed, so I have heard," said Howell, "and yet they tell me that he was a good player on the harp, though however that may be I cannot say, for he was a poshrât from down in South Wales and I never saw him. He died last winter, and their mother, who was one of old Merema's daughters, brought them up here on a visit to her relations. But, poor thing, she also died suddenly last week—God rest her soul—so I am taking the children back to their father's people."

"Poor children," said Mrs. Ffoulkes, "poor children—but tell me how is Merema herself, Howell, and when did you last see your uncle Jeremiah?"

So, somewhat to his disgust, Howell had to detail all that had happened during the last twelve months to every one of his wandering relatives, while Betsy overcame her repugnance and made friends with the children.

Presently Mrs. Ffoulkes, assisted by Betsy, spread supper and the party gathered round the table. It was a pleasant meal. Betsy did not remember that she had ever enjoyed herself so much before. Howell was gallant with a whimsical gaiety unlike anything she had met. His attentions were very different from the clumsy pleasantries she was accustomed to receive from the farm-boys.

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Mrs. Ffoulkes was delighted to hear all the news of her own people once more. "I wish that you travelled in this direction oftener," she said, "and do not forget to tell your mother how much I would like to see her; there would be a grand welcome for you all should you come this way."

The evening passed quickly, and all too soon it was time for Betsy to return to the farm.

Howell rose, saying that he would accompany her, but she refused his escort and, when he laughed and insisted, fled angrily from the cottage.

Before she had gone far she regretted her actions. The night was pitch dark, and after the warmth and laughter of her mother's kitchen she felt both cold and lonely; indeed, she was a desolate little figure as she climbed the hill and groped her way in the darkness over stiles and through hedges.

Howell would certainly have proved an entertaining companion, a pleasant contrast to Evan. On the other hand, he was so conspicuous with his velveteens and buttons and Gypsy swagger that a certain shyness and bashfulness had forbade her walking with him through the village street, and hearing the subsequent banter which would surely follow anent her vagabond sweetheart.

But as she climbed the hill in the darkness she thought about him. When she gained the farm she turned back and looked down into the valley. There was only one light in the village; it shone from her mother's cottage.

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"They are still talking," she thought. "I wonder if they talk of me. I have never met anyone like Howell before."

She was still thinking of him as she prepared for bed, and he was the last of her thoughts as she fell asleep.

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CHAPTER III

THE DANCE

THE following Thursday evening Mrs. Ffoulkes came up to the farm bringing the weekly bundle of washed and neatly mended clothes. On hearing her mother's voice, Betsy ran out to meet her and found that she was accompanied by Howell and by a little old man whom she remembered seeing long ago when as a child she played with her cousins in the Gypsy camp at Llandrillo —old Adam, her mother's uncle.

Howell greeted her in his usual flamboyant style, while Adam took both her hands and peered into her face.

"Baina over again," he said, and turning to

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Mrs. Ffoulkes, "she is a real kauli and the very spit of her grandmother."

"She is a good girl to me. I would be hard put to pay my way without her help," answered her mother affectionately. "And she is doing well here; the mistress thinks highly of her."

Howell whistled. "Not much paias, little cousin, between these walls. I can read thy fortune; some day thou wilt weary of it all and run away, is it not so?"

Betsy blushed, while Mrs. Ffoulkes said angrily, "Do not put such fancies into the child's head, lad, though, thank God, she knows better than to be so foolish."

"Thou hast reared her a house-dweller, Sarah," said the old man, "and thou dost delight to cumber thyself with household gear, but scorn not the way of thy own people."

Meanwhile the farm girls and lads had gathered about the strangers, and noticing the neck of a fiddle protruding from the pocket of the old man's well-worn green coat they seized the heaven-sent opportunity and begged for some dance music, the request being eagerly seconded by the farmer's wife, a buxom woman, who dearly loved a frolic and welcomed such a break in the monotony of daily existence upon the upland farm. But Adam was well aware of his value as a minstrel and very conscious of his tribal dignity, and it was only after the farmer himself had joined his entreaties to those of his household that he at last graciously condescended to promise to play for them.

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At once all was bustle and excitement. Mrs. Evans laid out mugs and cider, and the great kitchen was quickly cleared of its heavy furniture by many willing hands. Then the men and girls, in such finery as they had been able to procure and don on short notice, crowded in, and when all was ready Adam installed himself in a corner with Mrs. Ffoulkes and the farmer and his wife beside him and struck up a lively tune, while the men selected their partners.

Evan surveyed the company and then began to make his way deliberately towards Betsy, but he was forestalled by Howell who stepped briskly forward, made a courtly bow and took her hand.

"Thou wilt stand up with me, cousin." Without more ado he led her to the top of the room—as if to their rightful position—where they led off the dance, leaving the outraged son of the house to console himself with some other girl and a lower place.

The evening wore merrily on, becoming ever more and more boisterous, the room grew hot, mugs of cider and sometimes a nip of whisky passed from hand to hand; the farmer led Mrs. Ffoulkes to join the dancers while his wife footed it bravely with the youngest. Sometimes the majority of the company would rest for a short space while a single dancer executed a wonderful reel or jig alone. Howell's grace, speed and agility made him ever the most applauded of these performers. The information that a dance was in progress at Three Trees Farm had spread marvellously about the countryside, and men and

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girls from Yspytty Vach and from neighbouring, albeit distant, farms presented themselves and helped to swell the revels. But no display of charms could tempt Howell from his chosen partner, and so handsome and gallant and so debonair a dancer was he, that Betsy found herself envied by all the other girls, while Evan sulked and the farm lads endeavoured to imitate or vainly affected to despise such graces.

And Betsy's Gypsy gallant reached the apotheosis of glory later in the evening when Mrs. Evans, assisted by some of the older members of the party, spread a farm-house supper enjoyed by the company in relays; for then Howell doubled his triumph by taking the fiddle while his uncle refreshed himself, and not only playing and singing with, if possible, greater spirit than the old man, but sometimes even leading the dance also, footing it fantastically opposite his partner, fiddling all the time.

"Impudent vagabond," muttered Evan, but though most of the men agreed with him, the female portion of the company were to a woman fascinated by the stranger.

It was daybreak before Adam put his fiddle in his pocket and laid his hat crown downwards on the floor. While the hat was filled with coins by the departing dancers and the old man drank a farewell cup with the farmer, Howell and Betsy stood together for a moment in the fading starlight. "I must join my people for the Corwen horse-fair to-day," he said. "I will write to you, little cousin."

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Betsy nodded assent as her mother and Adam joined them and the farmer called her indoors. "Get a wink of sleep, all of you girls. Why, it is almost light and the cows must be milked in an hour's time."

. . . . . .

The following Tuesday, Betsy received a letter. She could not read, so was obliged to seek the help of her room-mate, Margot. Howell could not write, and the letter had been written for him by the village post-mistress at Llandrillo. "Dear cousin," it ran, "I hope this finds you well as it leaves me. I will be near Yspytty Vach on Wednesday. Meet me beside the two white gates in the lane at dinner time. Your loving cousin, Howell."

"Are you going to meet him?" asked Margot curiously, and a little enviously.

Betsy tossed her head. "I do not know yet—perhaps I will."

"He is very handsome to be sure, but you do not want to keep company with a Gypsy—it will vex Evan if he sees you with him."

"Evan!" answered Betsy. "Evan is nothing to me."

. . . . . .

"Sweetheart, my little sweetheart, come with me."

Betsy tore herself away from him and regarded him gravely. She was standing with Howell in the lane beside the two white gates. It was midday; the farm

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dinner had just been partaken of and great piles of dirty plates, mugs, spoons and knives were awaiting her return. After they had been washed and put away the kitchen must be scrubbed, coal carried, the fire built up and chicken food and pig food prepared, before she began the back-breaking, hateful task of ironing, which would last until bed-time. Since five o'clock that morning she had been working. Yesterday had been washing day and she had crept to bed too tired from standing over the wash-tub to hold herself upright. So it was every week, so it might be as far as she could see, for ever.

"Come with me, sweetheart, little wife."

She scrutinised her tall, ginger-haired Gypsy cousin. "Dost really love me, Howell?"

As in reply he stepped forward to seize her again, she put her hands in his. "Yes, I will come."

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CHAPTER IV

OVER THE BROOMSTICK

FIVE minutes later Howell led Betsy over the fields away from the farm and Yspytty Vach. After an hour's rapid walking, he halted in a little fir and larch copse which bordered a sunken mountain lane.

"We will wait here for my people, sweetheart."

They sat down upon springy cushions of heather and whinberry bushes and made love to each other until they were disturbed by voices and the pattering of feet, as the vanguard of the Gypsies—three small boys and a donkey—came into sight. Followed men and women, old and young; children and dogs playing and quarrelling, laughing and shouting, and barking; pack donkeys with little brown babies or bantam cocks and hens perched atop the wallets; horses, mares with their foals; and last of all the old blind grandmother riding a white donkey led by one of the boys.

Howell rose, jumped down into the lane, and pulling Betsy after him, made his way through the crowd to his mother.

"Daia, I have brought my wife."

She dreaded her aunt Syforella and would have fled

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had not her lover seized her arm and held it tightly. But the old Gypsy looked kindly at the trembling girl.

"So, little lady, thou wilt forsake thy friends and the houses of the gauje to follow the ways of thy mother's people. Well—God be good to thee—thou hast a pretty face. There—get along with the boy; thou dost fear the old woman and he would be sweethearting."

Betsy found herself in the midst of an unusually large company of Gypsies, for, two bands chancing to meet that morning, the proposed route of one had been abandoned and they had all travelled on together. They were in high spirits, the old people exchanging news and confidences, the young ones laughing and joking and playing tricks on each other as they climbed the hill. The news of Betsy's position among them soon spread, and all the chaff was focussed upon the young couple. It was kindly fun for a time, but after Howell had been called away from her side to help with some restive horses, his sisters fell to teasing their house-bred cousin, ridiculing her lack of travellers' lore.

"How wilt thou live with a gauji wife, Howell?" they mocked when at last he rejoined his tearful bride. "Wilt become a house-dweller and live within four walls all the summer through?"

He turned angrily upon them.

"She will prove a better wife than any of you are like to be—that you are." He made as though he would strike the nearest, but she skipped out of his reach and worried him from a safe distance.

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"Peace, children," said the old man, their father, who had overtaken the group, "and you, daughters, be silent. Give the girl fair play. Come and walk with me, bita rawnee, and tell me of thy mother and others of thy kin."

Presently they reached the top of the hill, and here the band divided. A few men and most of the women and girls followed the lane which led down to the high-road and villages of the opposite valley, while the main body—which included all the donkeys and children, a number of men and horses, and the older women who preferred to go straight to their lodgings, instead of seeking custom in the valley—turned to the right along a track amid the heather on the summit.

Howell and Betsy followed slowly behind the cavalcade.

"Thou wilt have to teach me many things, Howell," said Betsy. "They were right; I know little of your ways, but I am a Gypsy and I will soon learn."

"So thou wilt, thou wilt surely beat them all on their own ground, and quickly."

They walked on in silence for some way, and then Betsy spoke again shyly.

"When can we be married, Howell?"

"Married? We are married; we have promised each other; thou art my wife already, sweetheart."

"We must be married in a chapel," muttered Betsy uneasily.

Howell hailed his mother who waited until they came up to her.

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"Daia, listen, this girl of mine wants to be wed in a chapel."

"Thou wilt have to wait a while, then, bita rawnee; we cannot stay so long in one place now as to fulfil the laws of a gaujikano wedding. But wherefore dost thou desire a chapel? I do not hold with these newfangled ways; it is better far to follow the fashion of the old people and be married as I and my mother and her mother before her were wed."

"And how was that?" asked Betsy.

"You must promise in front of all who are here to be true to one another, and seal your promise by jumping over a branch of broom. And the broom is in blossom now, that is of good augury for thee, thou wilt bear many children."

"That must content thee, sweetheart," said Howell. He plucked some mountain rushes. "See, I will plait a marriage ring for thee, and by and by, when we have earned some money, we will buy a golden one."

"Aye, aye," said the old woman, "buy it with money earned by the two of you; thus it will bind you together rightly; and remember to keep the rush ring always, daughter. It will be a talisman against evil in your married life."

"Hold out thy finger, wifekin," said Howell. "See, does the ring fit?"

After supper that evening the Gypsies assembled in a barn, and with clasped hands Howell and Betsy plighted faith and ratified their promise by jumping

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over a branch of broom which the old man held before them, with one end resting upon the ground. Howell vaulted gallantly, leaping high in the air; Betsy, fearful of tripping or jumping short, and holding up her skirt with both hands, just cleared the stick after a timid little run, and, amid shrieks of laughter from the onlookers, her husband prevented a stumble by catching her in his arms. The ceremony was completed by the old man placing the rush ring upon the tip of her ring-finger. Howell himself pushed it down into place.

After that Betsy had only an indistinct recollection of noise and mirth. There was eating and drinking, dancing and shouting and singing, and the playing of many stringed instruments. One partner after another seized her and twirled her round and round the barn. The farmer and his household, attracted by the noise, were there, and learning the occasion of the festivity, must also dance with the bride, until at last Howell carried her away into the night, while behind them the noise and the shouting and the music gradually ceased, and sleep and peace fell upon the lodiben beneath the quiet stars.

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CHAPTER V

A NEW LIFE

BETSY flung open the blanket walls of the tiny tent which Howell had built to shelter them and crept out into the morning sunshine. Her husband, called abroad by his father to water the horses, had risen an hour before, leaving her to day-dreams—now he was nowhere to be seen and she halted irresolute and looked about her.

Far below lay the valley they had travelled up the previous afternoon, the river winding like a dim and shimmering riband along its floor; beyond the valley, concealing Yspytty Vach and the Farm of the Three Trees—her life there seemed to have already faded into a memory of some distant past—rose the tangle of rocky spurs she and Howell had crossed in the noontide. The grandeur of the scene was wasted upon Betsy. Though (or perhaps because) she was mountain-bred, her domestic nature had always loved better the quiet homely aspect of the lowland country, and she cared nothing for the splendour of the hills.

She did, however, notice that the opposite ridge, like that on which she stood, was bright and warm in the rays of the morning sun, while the intervening

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valley still lay in shadow, and she imagined the latter as an impassable gulf dividing her from her former life. At that moment a thick cloud passed overhead, screening her from the warmth and brightness of the sun, and a superstitious shiver shook her as she glanced round at the barn, the tents, the open fires with groups of Gypsies gathered about them, and a sudden remembrance that she could never again be the girl of the evening before, made her realise crudely that she had indeed crossed her Rubicon, visibly typified by that deep dark valley. Frightened, and possessed by a chilly fear of the unknown future, she again looked in vain for Howell, her only stay in this strange world.

The Gypsies were all astir. Men who had no horses to care for were lounging and smoking, while the women made preparations for breakfast; fires were already lit, kettles filled and hung from the kettle props to boil. Half-clad or wholly naked children, playing and fighting with each other, were scampering about like rabbits in and out of the tents, and around their mothers' feet. Some of the women, seeing Betsy, signalled a friendly good morning, but she felt too strange and shy to mingle with them and sat down before her tent to await the return of Howell. Three or four of the children, however, approached and talked to her, and from them she learnt that her mother-in-law had gone to the neighbouring farmhouse in quest of food.

Presently she heard amid the chattering voices the

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peculiar Romani whistle thrice repeated. At the sound, two of the lounging lads sprang to their feet and hastened to meet their grandmother and relieve her of her baskets, for she was heavily laden with meat and great crusty loaves of bread, fresh butter and eggs, a large pail of milk, and a jug of cream, all presents from her friend the hospitable mistress of the farm.

After the old woman had directed the boys where to place her things, she looked keenly around her and, quickly espying Betsy sitting idly apart, strode to her side.

"Tut, tut, little lady, do not sit there; thou must not idle, thou art married now; let thy husband see what thou canst do, posh gauji though thou art. Bring my basket from the barn, take the cloth from it, get the dishes from my other basket, and spread our breakfast yonder."

Betsy, trembling and nervous, but thankful to have definite work and a place in the domestic life of the tribe assigned to her, rose with alacrity and was going towards the barn when her mother-in-law recalled her.

"Stop a moment; come here first, my lady, sit beside me. See, here is bread for thee, here is meat. Cut up this loaf, then the meat, and lay a slice of meat upon every piece of bread, then set them aside. And see, here is another loaf for thee! Here is butter for thee! Cut this bread thin and spread plenty of butter upon it; it is for thee, and me, and thy father-in-law."

Betsy, always quick and neat-handed, set to work

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with a will, and had soon prepared two large dishfuls of evenly-cut bread and meat, and another of wafer-like slices of bread and butter. Then she spread the cloth upon the grass and laid out the willow-patterned cups and saucers and plates, the silver teaspoons and the knives, to the best advantage. She found a great bowlful of sugar in the old woman's basket and set it beside the jug of cream, then, judging that the latter would be for the use of the more important members of the family only, she filled a two-quart jug from the pail of milk. Syforella, who trusted no one to brew her tea, had carried the large china teapot to the fire herself.

By this time there was a cheerful sound of frizzling bacon accompanied by the sharp crack of egg-shells broken against the side of a frying-pan. Betsy's spirits had risen while she worked, and snuffing the appetising meal, she discovered that she was hungry. She looked over her preparations to make sure that nothing was forgotten. A touch of ornament—not indulged in at the farmhouse—seemed somehow fitting here; she ran across the field, plucked some sprays of wild rose from the hedge, and had just set them in a mug in the centre of the cloth when the old woman returned bearing the teapot.

Syforella had not hitherto shown much appreciation of her gauji daughter-in-law, but her satisfaction was evident now, and Betsy blushed with pleasure at the praise bestowed on her neatness. "Well done, little lady, well done," quoth she, and called to the old man,

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"Come here, Henry, come here, baw, and see how she has set out our breakfast."

The old man patted her shoulder affectionately. "Well done, my lady; indeed, it is the prettiest-set meal my eyes have ever beheld; and now, truth, I find that I am hungry."

"Call the lads, husband," said Syforella, "all is ready."

The men and children were scattered about, some here, some there, and the first of all the band to answer his father's whistle was the long-looked-for Howell. He flung a couple of hedgehogs down before Betsy's feet. "There, my little sweetheart, are two fine fat hedgehogs for thee."

She stared at them in bewilderment. "Why, what use are they?"

Howell laughed. "To eat, to be sure, ignorant little sweetheart; we will cook them for supper, and thou wilt tell me how good they are." He picked a stick from the ground and killed the hedgehogs by knocking them over the head and then fell-to upon his breakfast.

When the substantial meal was finished, the company set about preparations for the various pursuits and businesses they intended to follow during the day.

"We do not move on until to-morrow, little lady," said Syforella as she fastened her begging sheet around her and lifted her large hawking basket. "We will all return this evening, so thou shalt stay here to take care of our goods; and hark thee, girl, have a fire alight

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against our homecoming." She set out attended by a couple of girls; the other women, similarly accoutred, some in addition bearing babies slung in their shawls, or carrying toddling mites, also departed in chattering groups.

The men meanwhile had gathered together in different parties; one set intended to go fishing, another prepared fiddles and harps to attend a distant wedding, others went away singly with grinding barrow or fiddle. Matthew and Howell made ready to accompany their father to a village fair where they expected to sell a horse. The children left at home ranged far afield on expeditions of their own, splashing in the river, bird-nesting, or ingratiating themselves with the farm men or maids for jam and cake, or permission to play in the farmyard, and in a short time Betsy was quite alone save for a little dog who, despite his introduction to her by Howell, haughtily refused to make friends, regarding her with an armed neutrality as a stranger to the tribe. She brought out a half-knitted sock that she had begged Rosaina to leave with her, and as she worked gazing into the fire or at the mountains, thinking of the great step that she had taken, and of the strangeness of the life that lay before her, the foreboding of the early morning fell upon her again and, like the child she really was, she wept for her mother.

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CHAPTER VI

THE HAUNTED FARM

HOWELL and his father came back early in the afternoon. Betsy made some tea for them and was praised and petted, so that her serenity was restored by the time the old woman returned.

The following day they moved on. Rosaina and Ellen started early in the morning, intending to make a round of calls at outlying farms and cottages on their way to the new camp. Howell and Betsy formed as yet part of the old woman's family, possessing nothing of their own save a couple of blankets and the tent rods which he had cut on their marriage night. These were quickly made into a bundle, and then Betsy helped the old woman to pack her wallets, roll the blankets and, assisted by a boy, arranged everything on the backs of the donkeys. Meanwhile others collected and burnt every scrap of rubbish, so that before they set out again on their leisurely progress across country, the only trace left of their sojourn was the charred circle made by the fire.

One night was spent in the new lodiben and then they moved again; two more days found them, after having described a wide half-circle round Yspytty Vach,

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encamped in a valley near the river only about twenty-five miles distant from that village.

Day by day Betsy was growing more accustomed to her new life. She was not invited to accompany the women when they went hawking, but she made herself useful in the camp, sewing or darning stockings, and, after she had been carefully instructed in ceremonial cleanliness, helping to cook, and wash the crockery.

She was showing great quickness in picking up the Romani speech and could already understand much of what was spoken around her. She stored strange words in her memory and at night made Howell repeat over to her what she had not understood.

"Canst wash clothes, girl?" asked Syforella one evening.

"Yes," answered Betsy absently, for her attention was entirely engaged by a little wooden pipe that she held tightly between her teeth.

Though her mother was addicted to tobacco, as no woman smoked at the farm she had not acquired the habit. But since all her new companions puffed continuously and she wished to emulate them in everything, she was learning under Howell's instruction; so far she had only succeeded in burning her lips and choking herself and felt relieved when her pipe went out, which it did every two minutes.

"Thou shalt wash some for me to-morrow, then," continued the old woman, "and we will see what thou canst do. I will show thee how to set to work before I start in the morning."

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"Thou hast let out thy pipe again, sweetheart," said Howell. He twisted a scrap of paper that had been used to wrap some package brought from the village shop, kindled it at the fire, and set her pipe alight once more; then, noticing that his mother had just refilled her pipe and was in need of a light, offered her the spill which she refused.

"Ach, phui, no, boy, do not give me that, I would have a foul taste in my mouth all night should I use that; give me a piece of stick."

That night, for the first time since their marriage, Howell did not build a tent and they slept in a corner of the barn shared by the Gypsies in common.

"It is thy turn to tell a tale to-night, sister," said the old man, when they were all comfortably settled.

Eldorai, a sombre old woman whom Betsy had scarcely spoken to, replied, "I know no tales."

"Thou must tell one, thou must," answered the old man; "thou hast been amused other nights, now it is thy turn to amuse."

"I will tell a true tale, then," and after a few moments' thought, she began:

"There was once a party of Romane in Anglesey travelling about, like we are, from one lodiben to another. They were my father and mother with all their little children, and Adam, my mother's brother, was also in their company. One night—they were lodging in a barn close to a great old farmhouse—my mother went to see whether her children were sleeping quietly, leaving my father and uncle sitting

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beside a large fire in the field. Just as they reached the door of the barn she saw a bright light shining on the path before her feet. 'Reuben,' she called to the eldest child, 'Reuben, what art thou burning?' But Reuben and all the other children were asleep. She stood by the door and whistled, but got no answer. Frightened by the strangeness of the light, she returned to the fire and looked for the men; they had disappeared. 'Daude, I understand now, they would play a trick upon me and frighten me by pretending to be ghosts. Jerry,' she shouted two or three times to her husband; she heard nothing and called her brother, 'Adi, Adi, what art thou doing, where are you two?' At last she saw them coming back across the field. 'Where have you been?' 'My dear God, what is in this place?' said Adam, when he came into the firelight, and Jerry cried, 'Girl, something has happened here; didst thou see anything?' 'Yes, I saw a ghostly light,' said she. 'We have seen more than I would wish thee to see.' 'What didst thou see, Jerry, and what is the matter with my brother? Look, he has fallen down!' She went to him; his clothes smelt of pitch and brimstone. 'Come, Adam, come, mate,' said my father, 'we will go to the barn. I will tell thee all in the morning, wife.' 'It is morning already; hark to the clock, it has just struck one.' 'Yes, true, but let us go, we will pack and leave this place, for it is enchanted.'"

Eldorai's monotone ceased. "Are ye sleeping, mates?" she asked sharply.

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"No," the answer came from various quarters of the barn, "go on, go on."

"They packed up that night by the light of a candle," Eldorai continued, "and sat waiting for morning. When the first glimmer of dawn became strong enough to show them the road, they set out and by breakfast time had reached another farm, where my mother went to ask permission to lodge in the barn. She saw the farmer himself. 'You are early travellers, my woman,' said he. She told him of their disturbed night. When he heard the name of the farm his face grew grave. 'Where are thy husband and brother?' he said. 'I wish to speak to them; I will come with thee now.' 'No, thou wilt not, sir. Thou hast had thy breakfast; we are hungry and will not speak with thee now; come to the barn in two hours' time.' 'Go up to the house,' said the man, 'they will give thee bread and bacon!'"

"That is the way to treat the gentiles," said Rosaina, "to make them wait for you."

"Naturally, girl," said her mother, "we are not their servants to receive orders from them."

"Shunta, shunta; go on, Eldorai."

Eldorai resumed her story. "Later in the day my mother went to the farm kitchen and heard from the maid-servant the history of the farm they had left that morning.

"'It belonged to my master's brother,' said the girl. 'He was not a steady God-fearing chapel-goer like this man; he used to drink and play cards and lose his

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money. On a day things changed with him and hereafter he had always much money, but he was ever troubled. His brother asked him how he came by so much wealth. He replied: "You will know on the day that the devil comes to fetch me." "Do not speak so, it is ungodly. There is fear upon me when you say such things." "Thou dost not believe, but I know that I have sold myself to the devil." "God have mercy! what dost thou say?" "Thou wilt understand the day that he comes to fetch me." "To fetch thee, dear God! to fetch thee; such a thing could never be. How didst thou sell thyself to the devil?" "A fine gentleman came to my house one day; he was arrayed like a lord; how should I have suspected him? He was a man to my eyes; I bid him enter. 'What is thy name and what is thy business with me?' 'I have heard that thou art a great gambler,' said he; 'let us play together.' We sat at the table and dealt out the cards. I won the first hand, and the second, I won all through the day. 'Thou dost play well,' said he; 'we will make an end now unless thou wouldst like to play all night.' 'I will take you on all night, then,' I said. I told the maid to bring food and beer; she put them on the table. He called for wine; we drank and played until midnight. He arose. 'See, it is twelve o'clock and my time has come; thou hast beaten me all day.' He laid his hand on my shoulder. 'I will return in a year and a day; remember that thou art mine; go where thou wilt, thou canst not escape from me. I have played with thee all this time, I have

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won thee, thou art mine now.' And with these words he disappeared. I knew at last, too late, with whom I had played; it was the devil. I caught a glimpse of his foot, that was enough. I said nothing, and the year passed. The day he was to come for me I sat awaiting him. At midnight a great gale arose and set the bells that were hung on the tree near the house to summon the men to dinner, tolling. I trembled and feared and tried to call to arouse some of my men. Before I had spoken a word, up we went, my chair and I, through the house and into the garden. And there the men found me in the morning. I remember no more. But I tell thee that I have sold myself to the devil." He lived for some time after this confession, and when he lay on his death-bed he would let no one touch him. He said, "Do not come near me; I leave plenty here beneath my head, and hidden in the bed, for you all. I will give him none of my money; it is enough for the old devil that he gets me. All leave me, he will come soon. Go now." And then he screamed, "Here he comes!" and died. His ghost has never been seen to walk. Sometimes a great noise is heard, but his brother says, "It is the wind blowing, he cannot touch me, I am in God's hands and the devil has naught to do with me."'"

There was a moment's silence when Eldorai ceased to speak. "Amen," said the old woman, "and so I hope it is with us all," and she began to tell her beads. Her muttered prayers were the only sound in the barn as one by one the listeners dropped off to sleep.

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CHAPTER VII

THE DEMAND OF THE GAUJE

In accordance with her word of the night before, the old woman summoned Betsy after breakfast the next morning to attend her to the river bank. They each carried an armful of soiled linen, Betsy's burden consisting of body clothes and towels, Syforella's of tablecloths and dish-clouts. About one hundred yards distant from the camp, hidden from it by a belt of trees, the river was spanned by an old grey stone bridge, covered with tiny wall ferns and lichens and bearing a little-frequented byroad. Here they threw down their bundles, glad of the cool shadow of the arch, for the sun was already hot, giving promise of a sultry day.

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"Put the clothes on one side for the present, girl, thou canst attend to them soon," said the old woman. "I will first teach thee how to deal with the xobeneskere." She chose a shallow pool where the stream ran clearly over a pebbly bed and showed Betsy how she should scrape out a hole in the gravel and so fashion a wash-tub in which the water was for ever changing. Her pupil, accustomed to a washing day of heat and steam, doubted the efficacy of the cold water; nevertheless, she obediently knelt upon a boulder and soaped and rubbed. Then she wrung out the cloths and, directed by the old woman, spread them upon a hedge to dry. Syforella examined them critically. "They are white as snow," she said. "Thou didst learn to wash among the gauje, bita rawnee; now that all things connected with the food are dealt with, thou mayst wash the clothes. Ach, daudi, they want washing indeed; thou wilt need to rub them on the stones, girl, before they will come clean, and afterwards lay them on the grass to bleach. I will go now, and come again to see what thou hast accomplished in an hour's time."

Left to herself, Betsy sorted out the badly stained clothes and rolling them into a bundle with plenty of soda, put them to soak in the little pool of running water. Then she excavated a second basin farther up-stream where she began to wash out the slightly soiled garments. While she was thus occupied, singing merrily to herself the while, she heard the rumbling of wheels and the galloping of a horse upon the bridge; there

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followed a grating sound as the brake was suddenly applied and the horse pulled violently back upon his haunches. Then her half-brother, Bill, jumped from the stone parapet of the bridge and seized her arm.

"You damned little bitch, I have found you at last. I have been going round the country after you for the last three days."

"Let me go; you would not dare to touch me if Howell were here. I'll call to Aunt Syforella."

Bill clapped his hand over her mouth. "You will do no such thing," he said roughly. "You have done with that company."

She struggled hard to free herself from his grip. A shamed sense of her ludicrous position prevented her from screaming for help from the women left in the camp. Howell, she knew, was miles away with his grinding barrow.

Bill dragged her over the parapet, bundled her into the trap beside him, whipped up the horse and drove rapidly off, Betsy sobbing by his side. "Now listen to me," he said, when they had covered a couple of miles in silence. "I am taking you back to your mother, and never let us hear you speak of this foolishness again."

Betsy found the use of her tongue once more and with it her usual courage and independence. "You are married, Bill, and you chose for yourself; I have the right to choose for myself."

"No, you have not," answered Bill shortly. "Your place is with your mother, she grows old and cannot

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work as she once did; you must take care of her and help her."

"By God!" cried Betsy, "you are selfish and unfair, Bill. I have helped my mother, I have worked since I was eleven, and Howell and I will always help you, but I must live my own life as you live yours. I am going back to my husband."

"Your husband!" sneered Bill. "When and where were you married?"

Betsy thought of the broomstick in the barn and was silent. "Some day, of course, you will have a husband—and pray that he may never hear of this mad scrape—but if I ever catch you with one of that breed again, by the Almighty God, I will saw you limb from limb." Betsy continued to sob, but said no more.

They stopped twice to bait and water the horse and late in the evening drove up to their mother's cottage. Bill fastened his tired horse to the gatepost, drew Betsy into the kitchen and shut the door behind them. "Here she is, and a fine dance I was led before I found her," he grumbled.

Betsy hugged her mother. "I am sorry, Howell would not let me come back to tell you I was going with him; we were coming together to you soon. Bill dragged me away, but I am Howell's wife and I am going back to him—I must."

Bill stepped forward. "You damned——" but his mother checked him.

"You are tired, poor child," she said gently, "and

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it is late; go to bed and I will bring a cup of tea to you there."

Betsy slipped thankfully into the bedroom, but she shut the door behind her with a defiant bang. She heard Bill go out to stable his horse and return, then her mother brought her some tea and bread and butter. After she had eaten, she lay in the darkness listening to the murmur of voices in the kitchen which continued until far into the night. Once waking from an uneasy doze, she heard her mother's voice distinctly. "I am not sure that you are right, Bill," she was saying, "you see, she has been with them for nearly a week; we do not know what sort of a pickle she may not have got herself into."

"It does not matter." Bill spoke vehemently. "Nothing may come of it; in any case, she must stay here; I will not have a sister of mine travelling the country with that gang."

"Bill," said his mother, "remember that they are my people. Howell is your cousin." Their voices dropped again, so that Betsy heard no more, but she felt somewhat comforted.

. . . . . .

Betsy lay very still, too highly strung to sleep, too sleepy to think, listening to the regular breathing of her mother and little brother. Bill had left again with a borrowed horse and everything was quiet. She wished that she too could fall asleep and leave the consideration

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of her troubles until the morning. She wished for so long and so persistently banishing all else from her mind that at last she really grew drowsy. She was aroused from this comfortable state by a low whistle—Howell's whistle. She sat up in bed, her first feeling being one of sleepy annoyance. Why could not he leave her for to-night? She lay down again, thinking that perhaps if she remained quiet he would go away until the morning. But there was another and louder whistle, followed by a gentle tapping on the window pane. Fearful that he might awaken her mother she crept wearily out of bed and drew aside the blind. Howell was standing outside; he beckoned imperiously to her to come to him. She threw a blanket around her, went out of the bedroom and opened the cottage door.

Howell was standing waiting for her on the threshold; he lifted her in his arms and carried her outside. "Had I been at home this morning, pirani, that hulking gaujo brother of thine would never have taken thee away. Come, we will be far from here before the day breaks, sweetheart."

But Betsy was utterly worn out, she thought of her mother asleep in the cottage, and laying her head on his shoulder, began to cry.

"What now?" asked Howell roughly. "Dost not want to come with me?"

"Yes, yes," sobbed Betsy. "But oh, Howell, not now, not like this, let me tell my mammy first."

"No, I have come across the mountains for thee,

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thou must follow me now," answered Howell sternly. Betsy only clung to him sobbing and shivering with cold.

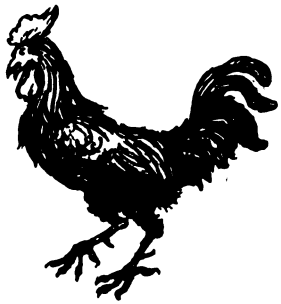
"Why, poor girl," he said presently, "thou art not even dressed; thou art but a child after all—well, what wouldst thou have me do?"

"Come in the morning and speak to my mammy; she will let me go to thee now, and we will be married by a minister."

"Swear, girl, that thou wilt come to me in the morning, whatever thy mother says."

"Why, yes, sure I could not live without thee now, Howell; but my mother will not refuse to see me happy."

Howell kissed her and reluctantly set her down within the cottage door. "Well, get back to bed, isha daudi, art cold as ice; I will come for thee to-morrow all in order, and I will speak with thy mammy. Will that content thee, little one?"



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CHAPTER VIII

THE WEDDING BELLS

THREE weeks later and it was the morning of Betsy's wedding day. The necessary interval, while her banns were called, had been spent quietly in her mother's cottage preparing wedding finery or scrubbing and cooking for the little household while her mother fashioned a wedding dress. Howell had paid occasional visits, having passed the time moving about with his father or in the compulsory residence in the village fifteen miles distant where the marriage was to take place.

Bill had insisted that the ceremony with its attendant Gypsy festivities should not be performed at Yspytty

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Vach. During the time of waiting she had not consorted much with her former companions. Some, she found, despised her as an outcast from their society, while others regarded her as the interesting heroine of a romantic love story and clamoured for details of her Gypsy life. She held herself proudly aloof from both sections, but they worried and disturbed her and she kept much within the cottage. To her relief she encountered no one from Three Trees Farm.

The earth was fresh and clean when Betsy awoke on her bridal day; rain had fallen heavily during the night and the trees that shadowed Mrs. Ffoulkes' cottage were still dripping upon the drenched highway, but the sky reflected in the puddles was washed clear and blue and the rising sun was glorifying the hill-tops, sharply outlining the familiar three trees on the crest of the nearest ridge. By six o'clock the bride was dressed; by half-past she and her cousin bridesmaid Hannah had breakfasted and were ready to start the fifteen-mile walk over the mountains which divided them from the village where Betsy was to be wed in the parish church. Mrs. Ffoulkes, after her marriage, had adopted the religion of her husband, and Betsy had been brought up as a Methodist and was a member of that community at Yspytty Vach. Howell, in common with the rest of his family, professed the Roman Catholic faith. All parties were, however, satisfied that the knot would be most surely and decorously tied by a minister who officiated in an ancient stone church and who had been endowed

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with the power to unite without the intervention of a layman.

Mrs. Ffoulkes kissed and blessed her daughter and then stood alone on the doorstep watching her as she stepped daintily along the muddy road, carefully choosing the cleanest places for her tiny shoes and holding high the skirt of her grey bridal dress, the white veil hanging from her little grey bonnet over her shoulders or streaming behind her as she faced the morning breeze. She looked very small and young to be setting out on what her mother—Gypsy-born herself—knew must prove a rough and difficult life to one admitted so late into the company of the Romane. She longed to recall her and reason with her once again, and she sighed as she told herself—as Betsy had told her brother—that the child had earned the right to choose her own way of life, and that her choice was inevitably taken.

The bride was quite untroubled by such forebodings, as she went on her way and turned at the corner of the road to wave a last cheerful farewell to her mother. The sun by this time had peeped over the hills at her and she laughed at her own shadow capering grotesquely alongside, exaggerating the springs and skips necessitated by the endeavour to keep her shoes clean upon the muddy road. The older and stouter Hannah trudged heavily by her side without attempting to avoid anything but the very deepest puddles. Presently they left the road, climbed a stile and followed a track which

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led over the mountains. Here they were met by Howell in holiday attire.

"Thou hast come at last, little sweetheart," said he. "I am weary of waiting, Betsy vach."

Betsy laughed and skipped out of his reach. "Dost admire my dress?" said she.

"Why, yes, though I like the girl inside it best."

She laughed again with pleasure and satisfaction and went farther away from him. "Stand back, do not touch me!"

But he was longer legged and longer armed than she, so he caught her and crushed her to him. "Thou art very fine to-day, my lady, but I want my girl." He released her at last and she shook out her ruffled plumage.

They went on up the mountain between hedges of white hawthorn and golden broom, the larks singing joyously overhead, until they came out on the open hillside amid fresh bracken fronds, tender green heather springing from among the dead stalks and bells of the previous autumn and the sunshine yellow of the spring gorse. "Let us rest a little, Howell," said Betsy. First carefully spreading her handkerchief over it, she sat upon a soft springy cushion of heather. Howell stretched himself at her feet. Hannah found a stone and, covering it with her handkerchief, seated herself. So they rested for a time, Hannah silent, and Howell speaking little, while Betsy chattered; it was contrary to her nature to remain quiet for long.

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At last Howell raised his eyes from contemplation of Betsy's shoes to the sky, jumped up and lifted her to her feet.

"Look! The sun is already high in the sky, we must hasten."

They went on over the crest of the mountain and began to descend the other side, a new landscape spreading itself before them. Far below they saw the valley through which wound a river and the white road that led away to the church which was to be the scene of their gaujikano wedding, and beyond, to the right, to the left and before them, more mountains. Presently they had left the heather behind and were plunging downwards through a wood carpeted with delicate pink and white anemones varied by patches of vivid bluebells. At last these also were left behind and they scrambled over a low stone wall on to the road. After following it for a couple of miles they entered the village.

The village street, save for a few children playing on the doorsteps, lay quiet and empty in the sunlight; even the inn opposite the church wore a deserted air. Howell looked about anxiously. "Well, maybe my people are already in the church." They passed between the tombstones and into the building. It was empty save for the caretaker and the minister who was entering the vestry. "God!" exclaimed Howell, "they will be too late. Never mind, little woman, we will make shift to do without them somehow." He went out into the

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road again, leaving the two girls shivering in the gloom of the church which struck chill after the bright sunlight they had walked in all the morning.

The old woman who acted as caretaker came and told them that they were already late and that if the ceremony were not performed quickly, it could not take place at all that day. Howell, however, soon relieved them by returning accompanied by an old man—a stranger whom he had chanced upon and who had consented to play the part of father to Betsy, so that when the clergyman in his surplice came from the vestry, they were all, marshalled by the old woman, standing ready before the altar.

There was only one more hitch before the knot was safely tied. When the clergyman asked for the ring, Howell had none ready—the rush one was long since decayed, and the pieces in a little bag hung round Betsy's neck. For a moment there was an uncomfortable pause until, prompted by the priest, the bridegroom removed a silver ring from his right hand.

They received the blessing of the Church, made their marks in the parish register, and left the building legal husband and wife amid kindly good wishes from Betsy's temporary guardian and the caretaker, both of whom accepted Howell's invitation to accompany them and drink their health at the inn.

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CHAPTER IX

THE REALTY

As husband and wife left the churchyard, they were greeted by shouts and cries of merriment, and streaming down the hillside came the Gypsies. First the shouting children and boys who had already reached the village street; then the old man in velveteens and silver buttons, the old woman in flounced silk skirt and Paisley shawl; Rosaina in a new red cloak, a similar one over her arm, which the old woman was bringing as a present for Betsy; Reuben and his young wife, and behind them a long jumbled procession of men, women, children and donkeys.

"We are too late, wife," said the old man, "the knot is already fastened; thou mayst put the ring thou didst buy for the wedding upon thy own finger now."

They all went into the inn where the feast they had bespoken was already prepared. Betsy and Howell sat side by side at the head of the table, as many of the Gypsies as could find room for themselves crowded the kitchen, the remainder carried out their portions and feasted in the road. A great copper bowl was placed on the table before Betsy; it was soon rapidly filling with gold and silver coins, wedding offerings to the

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young couple. Welsh men and women came to drink the health of the bride and bridegroom, for liquor was being freely served to the whole countryside; they added silver and copper to the contents of the bowl. The old man, Reuben, Cornelius and Dolphus played on harps and fiddles, the others danced and sang, while all the time the innkeeper and his rosy-cheeked daughters were busy drawing ale.

Towards evening, the room partially cleared; Betsy was still sitting at the head of the table between her mother-in-law and Howell; Cornelius and Dolphus, albeit rather drunk, were fiddling in a corner of the room; a few Gypsies and some young Welsh people were dancing, and others drinking, when shouts of merriment came from the road.

"Where has thy father gone?" said Syforella. "Go outside, boy, and look for him."

Howell went to the door and called Betsy, "Come, little wife, see the old men."

Black Henry, his brother Ned, and the old woman's brother Adam, surrounded by an excited crowd, were on the bridge, playing the children's game of "Soldiers," but instead of plantain stalks each was armed with a red herring held by the tail; a large barrel of those fish which they had found and purchased at the general shop stood beside them. The road was strewed with headless "soldiers" and the village children were scrambling for them to carry home for supper. Betsy would have liked to watch the fun, but she was soon

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recalled to her place at the head of the table by the old woman; a newcomer had entered to pledge the bride. And so another hour passed, the shouting and laughter outside became louder and louder, the dancers inside fewer, as one by one they went away to join the crowd upon the bridge. The old woman, who never lost an opportunity of doing business, was dukkering some girls. Betsy, alone at the head of the table, began to feel very tired and longed for Howell's return.

At last the door was banged open and Adam reeled into the kitchen brandishing a herring by the tail above his head. "Here is my soldier, here is the king of them all," he shouted. He gave the fish a final flourish around his head and flung it to the innkeeper. "Cook him carefully and bring him to me, I will eat my soldier for supper."

There was a commotion at the door, and the old man and his brother, followed by a laughing, shouting crowd, stumbled into the room, both dripping wet; Henry banged the table with his stick.

"Bring me some hot ale!" he cried.

"Miro dir devel, what has come to you old men?" said Syforella, "and what have you been doing?"

"Bring us some hot ale," he repeated, "that is all we want."

She turned to one of the young men and asked what had been happening. He pointed towards Adam who was superintending the frying of his fish. "Uncle Adi's herring was left the king, and to pay forfeit he made

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them both get into the empty barrel and he trundled them down the bank into the river; we have just fished them out."

"Diri daudi," said the old woman, "didst ever hear such foolishness?"

The merry-making was over and the last of the Gypsies were noisily assembling in the road preparatory to leaving for the barn where they meant to spend what was left of the night. Betsy emptied the contents of the bowl into Howell's neckerchief, knotted the corners together and handed the bundle to Hannah who meant to sleep at the inn.

"Take care of it, Hannah," she said, "you are going back to Yspytty Vach in the morning; carry it to my mother."

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CHAPTER X

WORK

"THOU hast idled enough, bita rauni," said Syforella one evening three weeks later, "it is full time now that thou shouldst work for thy husband." Betsy, who was busy preparing supper for the old woman and Henry as well as for herself and Howell, looked aggrieved.

"The girl does work," Howell defended her, "but thou shalt come out with me to-morrow, pirani, and sell these baskets that I have made—dost think thou canst do that?"

"She must do that and more than that," said the old woman. "Listen, girl; for the baskets thou mayst sell them and so bring home a few shillings, but they are only an excuse to go to the door and talk with the mistress and the maids. Thou canst talk fast enough when it pleases thee, little gauji; now thou must use thy tongue to some purpose—thou hast married a kaulo, talk like a kauli if thou canst."

"But what can I say?"

"Hark to the dinili! Dukker them, flatter them, please them, coax their treasure from them if thou canst—such fools were made to be cheated—and so they will give thee money. Thou must work for thyself, girl, as

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others do; if thou dost not, it will be bad for thee in years to come."

Howell interposed. "I am hungry, little wife; is it not supper time?"

Betsy lifted the pot from the fire and ladled a savoury stew on to the plates.

"Call thy father, boy, it is ready."

The next morning after breakfast Betsy dressed herself carefully for the road. She put on her new holland apron which had taken her long to make and trim—two little heart-shaped pockets fancifully edged with red braid adorned the front of the skirt to hold her money and any other small articles; beneath the apron she wore a larger pocket where she placed a screw of tobacco and her little black pipe, which by this time she had learnt to enjoy; she hung her best coral necklace round her neck and wrapped herself in a red shawl of Paisley pattern which Howell had bought for her.

When she came out of the barn into the sunlight Howell put a bundle of baskets into her hand and kissed her affectionately. "Thou dost look a real rauni," he said.

Syforella, who was watching them, grunted her disapproval.

It was a bright sunny morning, the heat tempered by a pleasant breeze; little clouds like wisps of white cotton-wool were scurrying across the clear blue sky, larks were singing madly overhead of the adventure of the day, and Betsy's spirits rose high as she followed

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her husband who went whistling down the narrow lane that led from the farm on to the high-road. The hedges were sweet with honeysuckle. She set down her baskets and gathered a buttonhole for Howell and a great bunch for herself while he stood and laughed at her.

"What wilt thou do with thy flowers, sweetheart? Thou canst not carry all, and the baskets must not be left behind." He took the flowers from her, stuck one branch into her hat, another into the bosom of her dress, and threw the rest on to the road. "Thou dost look like a May Queen now; let us go on."

When at last they emerged from between the tall hedges on to the high-road Betsy was pleased and interested. After three weeks spent among the hills it was exciting to see strangers once again driving or walking on the road, and she felt proud to show herself with the tall fiddler by her side. Most of the wayfarers greeted them with a cheery "Baro dda," accompanied by a look of admiration towards herself.

Presently Howell stopped before the gates of a large old house standing well back from the road amongst trees. "I will go to the front door to fiddle," he said, "do thou go round to the back door to the girls," and he strode away up the carriage-drive, leaving Betsy alone to find her way to the back. She followed a path through a shrubbery that seemed to lead in the right direction, but had not gone far before a great dog sprang out of the trees growling and barring the way. She was standing still, afraid to advance, when to her relief she heard a

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whistle and the dog cocked his ears as a young lady dressed in deep mourning came down the path; she called him to heel and then addressed Betsy: "What are you doing here?"

Betsy curtseyed. "Buy a basket from me, young lady; look how strong they are, my husband made them himself, and they will bring good luck to you."

"How do you know that?" said the lady.

"Let me tell you," exclaimed Betsy eagerly, "I can show you everything and tell you the whole truth."

The lady looked closely at her. "Tut, you are not a Gypsy, and only Gypsies can see into the future."

Now though Betsy had several times been an observant listener when the Gypsy women were dukkering, she had never attempted to tell a fortune herself, and indeed, loquacious as she generally was, felt shy and tongue-tied at the prospect of doing so. But she had married a kaulo and must try to prove to her mother-in-law that Howell had won a worthy bride, so she screwed up her courage. "Give me your hand," she cried peremptorily, "and I will tell you." Then she remembered the traditional opening, "Cross your palm with silver." She watched the lady place half a crown on her palm and then, after a slight pause which Betsy was too timid to take advantage of, return the coin to her pocket. Betsy looked in the girl's face, summoned all the self-confidence she could command at the moment, and began to speak: "You are in great trouble about something far away over the water."

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"Go on," said the lady, "you speak the truth."

Thus encouraged Betsy's timidity vanished and her native shrewdness returned to her. "You are sad because you have lost something of great value; you are waiting for news."

"Yes?" said the lady eagerly.

"It will be a long time, young lady, before you get news. Oh! do not cry," for at the words she began to sob so bitterly that Betsy wept in sympathy.

"Tell me more," begged the lady, "tell me more; I believe now that you know all. There was a Gypsy here the other day; she took silver from me but she knew nothing—you have told me the truth without money. My trouble is indeed over the water; now tell me more," and she continued to sob.

Betsy was gratified and at the same time a little frightened by the success of her first essay in fortune-telling. "Poor young lady," she said, "poor dear, there is nothing more I can tell you. Let me go, my husband is calling me," for she heard Howell's Romani whistle from the road.

"Wait," said the lady, "you must tell me more."

But Betsy's only wish now was to escape. "Let me go to my husband."

"Tell me where you are stopping, then; I will come to you to learn more."

"Far away over the hills. I will come back, lady, only let me go now."

"You will return soon?" and she put a sovereign

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into her hand. "Wait, tell me one thing: shall I get a letter this week? If I do, I will give thee much money."

"I know no more, but listen, I will bring my mother-in-law to you; she is very wise and she sees more than I can."

"Soon? you will return?"

"Oh, yes, I will; good morning, young lady," said Betsy hastily and she turned and ran.

When she came out on to the road again she looked about for Howell and whistled to him, but he was nowhere to be seen or heard. At last she espied three handfuls of grass by the wayside—a patrin left for her—and hurried along in the direction indicated. A second sign at the cross-roads directed her to a little village; she knocked at the door of the inn and it was opened by Howell himself.

"Where hast thou been all this time, girl?"

"In a fine place in company with a lady. Do not ever say that I am not the clever little woman; I warrant thee I have done better than thou hast to-day, the first time that I have ever been out, too." And, head held high, Betsy entered the inn kitchen and sitting on a settle deposited the baskets at her feet.

"What hast thou got?" asked Howell, following her.

"More than thou hast." She hid her right hand with the sovereign tightly clutched in it beneath her apron.

"And how dost thou know that? Come, show me." He caught her hand, forced it open and saw the sovereign.

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"Miro dir devel!" He called the hostess and ordered drinks. When she had brought them the woman lingered to gossip.

"Good day," said Betsy, "dost thou want a basket, lady?"

"And indeed," responded the woman, lifting one up, "they are good strong ones; how much dost thou ask for this?"

Betsy drank some cider. "A shilling."

After examining the whole stock with great care the woman selected a basket and paid for it.

"All the luck comes thy way to-day, bita pirani," said Howell.

They called at more houses and Betsy sold all her baskets. She did not attempt to tell another fortune. Late in the afternoon they returned to the camp, Betsy laden with sugar and flour and currants, and some holland which she had bought to make a new embroidered smock for Howell to wear when he went out with his grinding barrow.

"You have come back," said the old woman. "What fortune, my children?"

Betsy put down her parcels and began to busy herself about the fire. "I sold all the baskets," she began.

"She did more than that," boasted Howell. "She went dukkering and gained a sovereign; what dost think of my little wife now, daia?"

"So thou hast learnt to dukker, thou clever little gauji," said the old woman encouragingly.

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Betsy blushed at the praise. "It was a young lady in great trouble; she wanted to know more, daia—that I could not tell her. I promised that I would ask thee to go to her."

"Umph!" said the old woman, "that is not the path to follow to success, little one; shouldst work thy own fortune thyself and not give it to another, even though thou wouldst bungle while another would make much of it; but thou shalt go with me to-morrow and shalt have a share of the reward when I have spoken with her. Now set out the cups and the plates and get the frying-pan ready; thou wilt find bacon and eggs in yonder basket."

On the morrow, Betsy went again to the old house accompanied by her mother-in-law. She had held her head high after her success, thinking herself a wonderful fortune-teller. But to-day she learnt her incompetency, for when the old woman quitted the house she was the richer by ten pounds and the young lady was left comforted and happy, begging the Gypsy to visit her again whenever she passed that way.

"Daudi, thou art a good girl," Syforella told Betsy, "thou dost thy best, doubtless thou wilt gain many a shilling talking to servant girls in thy pretty way; but thou art but a half-bred Gypsy, thou canst not see the things that the Gypsies see; it is no fault of thine; mo dir devel has made us see farther than the gauje can see."

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CHAPTER XI

TAW, THE WISE MAN AND THE GHOST

"THERE is a great fear fallen upon the village, mammy," said Ellen one evening a week later. She had just joined a group of Gypsies who were lounging around the fire, after a day spent by the women in hawking small wares and fortune-telling in the surrounding countryside.

"Aye?" said the old woman, carefully ramming down the tobacco into her pipe with her thumb.

"It concerns the place where the young lady gave thee a golden sovereign, Betsy," continued Ellen. "The house is empty now, for the family have all gone away again to foreign lands."

"Did she get her letter?" asked Betsy.

"That I do not know. It is whispered that strange things were done in that far country where her mother, the old mistress, died, and now a ghost troubles the place."

"The old lady's ghost?"

"Hers or the murderer's, I suppose. I was told that last night the lodge-keeper was awakened by a fearsome sound like the roaring of ten thousand bulls. He arose and looked from the window, when he saw a light that came through the gate and up the drive, and he heard

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a noise like all the devils in hell laughing. Then the house was all lit up for a few moments and when the light was extinguished the devils laughed again. Sure, he was frightened from his life, and he says the place is haunted and seven parsons are going to pray there to-night to lay the ghost."

For three days the village was all agog, every evening news was brought to the Gypsies in the hills of fresh pranks played by the ghost; the prayers of the parsons, although repeated nightly, failed to exorcise it. On the fourth day the "Dyn hysbys" or "wise man" of the neighbourhood was called in and he sent a summons to Syforella. The emissary was a little ragged urchin, great-grandson to the sage; he brought a message and some secret token understood by the old woman.

"Give my greeting to thy taid and tell him I will meet him at the great hour to-night and that I will bring all that will be necessary."

The boy scampered away, and Syforella turned to Betsy. "Thou art obedient and quiet, girl, so that I even trust to thy discretion more than to that of my own daughters; thou shalt accompany me to-night."

After tea that evening, Syforella arrayed herself in her best clothes and ordered Betsy to do likewise. Then as darkness closed down they set out on their long walk to the village, Betsy laden with an empty whisky bottle and a Bible borrowed from Laija's gauji wife, Mary Hole-in-the-Wall. It was a long tramp over the hills. When they left the camp the western sky was all aflame

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with crimson and gold. As they passed on and on down the hillside the gorgeous pageant of the sunset slowly faded away until by the time they reached the high-road in the valley night had completely fallen. The old woman led the way, an active figure, scarcely requiring the support of the stick which she carried; Betsy followed a step or two behind.

"Come here, girl, give me thy arm—it is dark; the stars are obscured and the moon will not rise for another hour. Hark!" She held Betsy motionless for a moment. "Didst hear that distant cock crow? I like not to hear a cock crow in the night-time, it is from nature and bodes misfortune to someone."

Betsy giggled feebly, bravado struggling with her fear. "Perhaps the evil boded is for the ghost, daia."

"Keep silence, girl; talk not of what thou dost not understand."

"Dost thou believe in ghosts, daia?" asked Betsy, greatly daring. "I do not."

"Dost not indeed, bita gauji?" sneered Syforella. "Only a gauji could speak so, for their eyes are closed to many things always which are present to our eyes; the dear Lord gives us kaule the gift of seeing all things."

Betsy opened her mouth to protest that she also was a kauli, but thought better of her temerity and remained silent.

"You see, girl," resumed the old woman presently, "we are nearer to and more like the Lord than the

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gauje; do we not wander as He wandered and beg as He begged? Are we not born in barns as He was born? Do not our mothers lie upon straw in childbed as His Mother lay? Aye and we bear our children easily—not amid trouble and suffering as the gauje enter the world do our Gypsy children first see the light of the blessed sun. For His hand is light upon us so that we have freedom from pain and much insight into hidden matters, and also many good things for the body—pig flesh, and the precious farm produce in plenty—and credulous gauje like those we go to see to-night. In truth it is the best of lives to be born a kauli girl, even in these latter days when all things are degenerate so that my own children forsake the paths of their fathers. The dear Lord cannot look so favourably upon us now when we have mingled our blood with the blood of the gauje and are but half-breeds."

The old woman continued to talk partly to Betsy, partly to herself, seeming to forget that the girl on whose arm she leant was but a half-breed and that her son had debased his blood by mating with her. And Betsy also forgot and pictured herself and Howell living long and rearing a family true to all the traditions of Gypsydom. Her reverie was broken by a direct address from Syforella.

"It is a pity that thou art of gaujo blood, for I say not but that thou art a good girl and hast come well to our ways; thy grandmother did ill to marry a farmer's son—well, peace be to her, she paid for her folly."

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"I remember my grandfather," said Betsy.

"Dost so, girl? Thou wert but a little nub of a thing when he died; thou wert born in his house, for thy mother lived there with him until his death."

"How came my grandmother to marry a gaujo?"

"I will tell thee; I have often heard the story from my mother. It was summer-time and the old family were travelling in Lleyn, a great company of them altogether; they went in state in those days, many of them on horseback, accompanied by scores of pack-donkeys, and thou couldst hear the sounds of their fiddles and their laughter from afar—in truth those were good days, the old country was like heaven upon earth then. At that time my grandmother was a young girl and beautiful, straight as a poplar-tree, with a slender waist thou couldst span with thy little hands. Late one evening they halted in the lane before a large and prosperous farm and asked leave to lodge in the barns. The farmer's son came to the gate when he saw the great band waiting there and bade them welcome, and he looked at the harps and the fiddles. 'You will play for us to dance to-night?' he asked the men, but meanwhile he gazed only at Baina (God rest her soul, that I should speak her name!). She tossed her long black hair over her shoulder and laughed at him. 'Who will dance?' quoth she. 'Thou and I will dance together,' he answered.

"That night there was merry festival in the old farm kitchen, and as the sun was rising he and she stood together behind the barn. Blood fell from his nose upon

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her dress. 'Thou hast heated thy blood too much with dancing,' she said. 'My blood is on fire,' he answered, 'but it is for love of thee.' And he begged her to be his wife. 'The Romane mate not with the gauje,' she told him. But he persuaded her and they fled together on horseback. And presently her people received her again and became reconciled to her husband, and he followed the roads in their company, the first gaujo that ever did so; and that in my eyes was the first sign of the break-up of the Romani race. The old customs will last my day, but they are disappearing fast. And, chai, being a true kauli, she was ever a faithful wife to him, although he used to leave her for long periods. 'Will, Will,' she would say to him, 'I know that thou dost leave me to run after other women.' She spoke the truth, but always he returned to her and when he died he was buried in her grave. Though slighted she was honoured always in life and death."

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CHAPTER XII

THE GHOST IS PUT DOWN UNDER THE WATER AND TROUBLES THE HOUSE NO MORE

As Syforella finished her story they entered the village which was quite dark and deserted. They went on down the quiet street where no light showed from door or window, past the shuttered and silent inn and out again on to the open high-road. So they came to the gateway of the great house and passing through were engulfed in the deeper darkness of the tree-bordered avenue.

The entire population of the village were gathered together on the lawn before the house. Silently they made way for Syforella to pass into their midst to where the "Wise man" was conferring with the terrified lodge-keeper. The thrice-discomfited parsons had withdrawn at his advent, unwillingly abandoning their flocks to the ministrations of wizard and Gypsy. Obeying a gesture of the "Wise man" the awe-struck crowd fell back, huddled closely together and formed a circle around and some distance away from the central figures. Betsy, still holding the Bible and whisky bottle, stood alone within the circle, but too far from the ghost-dispellers to hear their muttered consultation. The

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moon had not yet risen, so that they waited in pitch darkness scarcely relieved by a glimmering lantern held by one of the men in the crowd; the light breeze of the early evening had completely fallen and the intense stillness of the night was broken only by the murmuring of the river and the occasional whimper of a tired child kept from bed that his mother's curiosity concerning witchcraft might be gratified.

The minutes weighted with expectation passed slowly away, but at last Syforella turned and beckoned Betsy. "Fill that bottle with water."

With the Bible still in one hand and the bottle in the other, she moved cautiously away, guided only by the sound of the river, into the inky blackness beneath the trees. The man who carried the lantern hurried across the lawn and followed her, holding the light to guide her footsteps through the brushwood.

"It is an awesome night," he said. "What are they going to do?"

"I do not know," answered Betsy. They both spoke in whispers. She filled the bottle, took it together with the Bible to her mother-in-law, and obedient to her command again retired, this time mingling with the crowd for the comfort of their company.

The "Wise man" took a piece of chalk from his pocket and drew a circle on the grass around himself and the old Gypsy woman, muttering incantations the while. Then holding the Bible in his hand, he placed the bottle between his feet and they continued to intone

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the spell together, the voice of first one and then the other rising dominant.

"They are witchering the ghost small enough to enter the bottle," whispered an old woman in Betsy's ear. The voices rose higher and higher and culminated in a shriek of triumph. There was a sudden spurt of light as the "Wise man" struck a match, and amid a silence in which the excited breathing of the crowd could be heard, lit a candle-end, stuck it in the neck of the bottle, and putting it into the hands of the Gypsy, made passes before it, saying, "'R wyf yn dy aberthu di i'r botel hon i aros yno hyd oni lysg y ganwyll hon i'r dwyfr" ("I sacrifice you into this bottle to remain there until this candle burns in the water"). Then, hand in hand, the old woman still reverently bearing the bottle, the pair moved slowly away across the lawn towards the boathouse, while tensely, with bated breath, the crowd waited. All at once, the clouds parted and the faint light of the moon in her first quarter illumined the scene, showing the two enchanters kneeling on the lowest step of the boathouse above the water. A faint splash was followed by a long-drawn "A—ah" from the crowd as they realised that the bottle had been committed to the river. The old man and woman came back briskly across the lawn to where they had left the Bible, the people pressing about them.

"Back," said the "Wise man," "back; do not weary us; the evil spirit is down, down under the water, and will trouble the house no more."

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Syforella left him and came to Betsy who shivered slightly at her approach, for had she not been communing with spirits? She addressed her sharply in a matter-of-fact tone: "Pick up the Bible, girl, and follow; we go home now."

"Stay," said the "Wise man," "I may need your assistance again." He drew a toad from his wallet; it was strangely marked as though a name were written upon its back. "Breathe into its mouth," he commanded; "I will do so after you." The old woman somewhat contemptuously complied.

As they walked home in the moonlight Betsy ventured to ask the meaning of this last rite.

"To bind us together sure; he believes that now he can call upon me when he wants my help."

"But can he, daia?"

"Huh!" said the old woman. "I know my business and my profit, girl. In some ways he is wise but in others very credulous as are all gauje, and it is well to humour them; my pocket is heavy from this night's work."

It was three o'clock in the morning when Betsy followed the old woman up the steep boreen to the barn where the Gypsies were lodged. Howell heard their footsteps on the stony track and came down to meet them.

"Well, little wife, hast laid the ghost?"

Betsy held his arm and whispered as they dropped a few paces behind Syforella, "They commanded it into a bottle and dropped the bottle in the river."

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"Whew!" whistled Howell; "my dai has got a pocketful of money, then."

Early morning though it now was, most of the party were sitting round the fire, even some sleepy-eyed children were still playing about. The old woman passed through the group into the barn where she could be heard rummaging among her possessions. Betsy sat down by the fire and recounted her adventures while Rosaina boiled up the kettle and made tea. When Syforella rejoined them she was in high good-humour.

"Well, my children, to-morrow I rest."

"To-morrow! it is to-morrow already," said the old man.

"Ou, aye, so it is; the day that follows I go to the great town." She drank her tea and smoked her pipe in silence.

"No tale-telling to-night, children, I am weary; in truth it was a long midnight walk—dost not think so, Betsy? But thou art young and I am growing old."

"I am tired, too," said Betsy, "I am for bed and sleep."

Slowly the group round the fire dispersed, each going to their allotted corner, and silence soon fell upon the great barn. But tired though she was, Betsy, excited by the events of the night, could not sleep; she shook Howell's shoulder and roused him.

"Dost think, in truth, the ghost is in the bottle?"

"How should I know?" he grumbled. "They say so, and the gauje are satisfied. The old woman has made much money; let me sleep."

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On the second morning the old woman went to shop in the nearest town, taking Rosaina and two of the boys with her. A suppressed excitement reigned in the camp all day. Everyone stayed at home speculating as to what she was likely to bring back with her, for in view of the wealth that was being expended, no one felt inclined to work. Late in the evening the four returned, all heavily laden with parcels which Syforella stacked in her corner of the barn.

"No, you shall not see to-night, children," she said in answer to their entreaties. "Let us have supper and rest."

"We know nothing," said the boys when they were eagerly questioned. "Our grandmam made us wait in the road until she called us into the shop to carry out the parcels."

Rosaina proved to be as ignorant as the boys and as anxious for information as her interrogators, so curiosity had to remain unsatisfied awaiting the old woman's pleasure.

The festivities incident to opening the bundles began early the next morning when Syforella produced a large packet of sausages which she instructed Betsy to prepare for breakfast. When all had eaten to repletion of the succulent feast the fun began. They crowded around the old woman who unpacked and displayed article after article to her admiring relatives. There was a new china teapot and some crockery for herself; there were delicacies to eat—sugar, currants, raisins and fine white

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flour, spices and ginger; shawls and petticoats for the women; dresses and ribands for the girls; new fiddles and fishing tackle for the men; sweets and oranges for the children; tobacco and tea for the older members of the band. There was nothing for Betsy.

"My dai has not given you anything," said Rosaina later. "Take this red riband of mine, Betsy vach." But Betsy refused.

"I suppose all the money is spent," Uncle Adam remarked to Betsy that evening.

"I cannot say," she answered. "I do not know how much she was given."

"It is not likely that any is still unspent; there is never any good from money gained easily by incantation or by the hokkano baro, it just slips away."

They stayed on at the farm in the hills for another week, but they were strenuous days for the old woman. Her fame had been noised far abroad; the whole countryside believed in her witchcraft and crowded after her to have the future foretold to them or their troubles cleared away by her magic power. There was no privacy in the camp; from early morning until late in the evening gauje were arriving, some of whom had travelled far for the consultation.

"I can bear this no longer, mates," said Syforella. "We will pack and begone to-morrow. I shall not return to this district until the excitement has abated."

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CHAPTER XIII

CAMPING IN THE OLD CHURCH

THE next morning they set out on their wanderings once more, journeying ever farther away from the scene of Syforella's triumph, covering ten or twelve miles each day and sleeping in barns or outhouses at night. On the third day they crossed the Straits into Anglesey. Here they departed somewhat from their usual circuit, and one evening saw them halted before a lonely farm upon the cliffs overlooking the island of Holyhead. The old woman was going as usual to ask permission to lodge in the barns when the farmer himself — a stranger to them — was seen advancing down the lane.

"There is no room in the barn," he said in answer to her request, "but if you please you can take shelter in the old church."

"What should we do in the old church?"

"Why, it is a fine dry place, you could live there the whole winter through in comfort; there is room for you all and for your horses also, if you like; you can see it yonder and you will find it open."

She thanked him and the farmer went on his way, while Syforella turned to her companions.

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"Come, mates, let us go and look at God's place."

They went through a gate, crossed a couple of fields and found themselves before a stone building, indisputably a church, though it appeared to have been unused as such for many years and was, in fact, at present a storehouse for heavy agricultural implements. The Gypsies were delighted with the novelty of their quarters. While the men unloaded and cared for the animals, the girls and children ran hither and thither exploring the curious place.

"I will make my bed here in this corner."

"And I mine here."

When all had selected their places a few of the boys and girls were dispatched to the farmhouse to beg some straw.

"Ask for oat-straw for me," said the old woman, "the farmer will give thee an armful for my bed."

Back came the boy with a small bundle of straw under his arm; the rest of the party were empty-handed.

"Mother, the farmer sends this armful to thee, he has no more straw."

The old woman spread her bed.

"Dordi! what shall we do?" asked Rosaina.

"Go and gather ferns; they are dry now and will make a comfortable couch."

A merry band made ready to set off up the mountain-side.

"Do you go and get some for us, Howell," said Betsy. "I'm tired."

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But Howell preferred to smoke and lounge by the fire which by this time was blazing fiercely in the midst of the church, while his tired little wife set out again with the fern-gatherers. She had tramped many miles that day carrying a heavy basket and was really exhausted, but she pulled and cut the tough stalks until she had collected as much as she could carry, when she made her way slowly back to the church alone, all the rest having finished and gone home before her. There was a light glimmering by the gate. She screamed and dropped the ferns, for a ghostly head with eyes of fire appeared, advancing towards her. Her scream was answered by a fiendish yell, followed by a burst of laughter, and she struggled to regain her composure as two of the boys, bearing a hollowed-out turnip with holes for eyes and a burning candle-end within, came up.

"She really thought it was a ghost," cried Roddy. "Why did you come out so soon, Jim, and spoil it all?"

"You were frightened, Betsy, were not you?"

But Betsy, who was utterly worn out, was more inclined to cry than to laugh. She did not recover until she was again within the old church, which was warm and comfortable.

After supper as they sat talking and smoking round the fire, Roddy told in triumph of how he had frightened her.

"Thou shouldst not have acted so, boy," said Uncle Adi, "thou shouldst not have played such tricks here,

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for it is a holy place, and I am remembering now that I visited it once before when strange things occurred."

"What happened? Tell us, Uncle Adi." And they all settled themselves comfortably to listen.

"I was a young married man," began Adam, "like Reuben or Howell there, travelling with my father and mother and many others of my family. And one night we lodged in an old church, it seems to me it was this very place. We were tired, we lay down and slept. At midnight one of the children awoke and called his mother. 'See, mother, our dear Lord's Lady put her hand beneath my head and awoke me.' 'What art thou saying, child? Thou art foolish.' 'I speak truth, mother,' said he. 'Come to the foot of my bed and sleep there and dream no more.' But the child was no foolish dreamer. An hour later another awoke and said the same thing. He sobbed and begged, 'Take me to that beautiful place I see yonder.' Then I arose and followed a light that I saw before me; it seemed to me that it was borne by my grandmother. I knew not where she was leading me. I went and I went up steps until I came out into the air, then the old woman ceased to go before me with the light. I awoke, it was broad daylight and I was alone in the field, wearing only my shirt. I laughed out loud at myself. 'What has come over me?' I walked to the door of the church and went very quietly back to my bed. My wife was asleep with our child in her arms. When I lay down she awoke. 'What is the matter with thee, boy, and where hast thou been? Thou art cold as

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ice.' 'Hush!' said I, 'I will tell thee when we arise.' 'Hast seen a ghost?' asked my wife. In the morning when we were all awake and dressed I said, 'Mates, listen: something ghostly was in this place last night.' 'I heard naught,' said one. 'Nor I,' said another. 'There is nothing here other than ourselves,' said my father. Up spoke the little boy. 'Thou liest, grandad, our dear Lord's Mother was here, I saw her and she put her hand beneath my pillow.' 'What didst thou see? The dear Lord's Mother? It is thou that liest, child.' 'Indeed, grandad, I saw her; she kissed me and said to me, "Thou art a pretty little boy, and thou art the Lord's boy. He will soon come to fetch thee."' Then said the boy's mother in affright, 'What says the child? We will leave this place to-day.' 'Thou art foolish, woman; the child lies, do not believe him.'

"The next night the old man himself awoke and he saw a priest in the church; a man and two women knelt before him telling their beads. He lit a candle and dressed himself. 'I will follow if my dear Lord gives me light enough and courage.' He went to the door; when he turned and looked back into the church it appeared to be all lit up and full of people and he heard beautiful singing. 'Dear Lord, grant me strength to support these sights.' But he could not move, and he knew no more until he found himself beside the fire again in the old church with all his people asleep around him. 'Get up, children, it is morning and I am hungry; prepare me something to eat.' We arose and made up

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the fire. 'Where hast thou been, husband?' asked my mother. 'Thou dost look drunk.' 'Thou also wouldst look drunk, lady, hadst thou been up all night.' 'Where hast thou been?' 'I know not, I know not; I am here now, that is enough for thee.'"

The firelight flickered and threw fantastic shadows on the walls of the church.

"And all that happened in this very place," added Uncle Adi solemnly. The company shivered and drew closer together, all but Betsy who expressed her scepticism.

"It was a dream, you people are for ever imagining that you see or hear something."

"It was not a dream," said Uncle Adi. "Thou art a gauji and dost not believe in such things; they will not appear to thee."

"I do not want to believe. God keep me from such things."

"We believe, and the Lord has gifted us so that we see them."

"I do not believe," said Betsy.

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CHAPTER XIV

BETSY HERSELF "SEES THINGS"

BEFORE another month passed Betsy herself "saw things." The band had turned eastwards again and re-crossed the Straits, and near Pentre Voelas she proved her Gypsy blood to her companions by seeing the works of the fairies.

They had halted late one evening before a farm where they were immediately greeted with shouts of joy by a little fat, misshapen girl, who ran out to welcome them, calling to those within the house to

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put on the largest porridge pot at once, for the old family had come.

"That is Ann vach Tylwyth Teg," said Rosaina as the strange little figure hurried back to the house to stir the porridge, trusting no one else to prepare it for the honoured guests.

"Who is she?" asked Betsy, "and why do you call her so?"

"She lives here with her brother and sister, and they do say that she is a fairy changeling."

The mistress herself now came out to welcome the Gypsies and directed them to seek their usual quarters in the great stone barn. It was a curious barn—built for a skittle alley in bygone days when the old farm-house was a country mansion—standing high upon the hillside, reached by steps cut out of the living rock. The hospitable promise of their welcome was fulfilled when later in the evening a couple of Gypsy boys toiled up the stairway laden with a huge pot of porridge and a pail of new milk.

The next morning Syforella sent Betsy to return the empty pot and pail. The mistress met her in the farmyard with the anxious query, "Have you seen my sister?" Betsy shook her head. "I fear I know not what; will you go into the fields and seek for her?"

Betsy assented and began her search. She passed through one field, and another and another, until at last she met the little one carrying a milking-stool in her hand.

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"Thy sister seeks thee, Ann vach; where hast thou been straying?"

The child gazed stupidly at her. "I have been milking my little cow," she replied.

Betsy looked around; neither cow nor milk-pail was to be seen, but before her in the field was a cowshed three yards high. She thought it the prettiest building her eyes had ever beheld. The little one threw the stool down upon the grass. Betsy took her by the hand and led her home.

"Say nothing," said the mistress when Betsy related how she had found her sister. "Tell thy mother I would speak with her."

Syforella was washing clothes in the river when Betsy delivered the message.

"Tachiben, thou didst see the cowshed, girl?"

"I did, with these eyes, and, daia, it was not strange then to find it in the field that was empty before, I thought only that it was the loveliest little place I had ever seen—yet now——"

The old woman left her washing and squatted down upon the grass beside Betsy.

"Aye, girl, so it would be—but keep thy mouth shut on the matter; it is not well to speak overmuch of the doings of the Tylwyth Teg. Yet, since they have shown thee so much I will tell thee more. The farm mistress often asks for my advice concerning the little one. Once or twice in the year she disappears, saying always that she goes to milk her cow, but none have ever

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beheld cow or milk, and thou art the first that has seen the cowshed, and I did not think that thou hadst the power to see so much, posh gauji as thou art. That little fat one is not as we are. After childbirth her mother lay resting alone, and there arose a great clamour in the house as of a thousand fairies quarrelling; but despite the noise she presently fell asleep. When she awoke the child in her arms seemed shrunken and something told her that it was not her own. When her husband returned she said to him that it was a brat belonging to the Tylwyth Teg. 'They bore away my baby and left me this.' So there, girl, the mother died and the little one lives on, a fairy changeling that brings much good luck to the farm. Now thou wilt finish the washing for me, while I go to the mistress; make sure that my aprons are white as snow. Daudi, daudi, girl, I did not mean that thou dost not always wash carefully. Truly thou art a kauli for cleanliness, or I would not trust thee with my things."

"So thou hast proved thyself true to breed after all, little one," said Uncle Adi that evening. "Thy mother-in-law tells me that thou didst see the works of the 'little people' this morning. It is given to all Gypsies to see more than the gentiles, but thou wert ever a scoffer."

"Scoff no more, little wife," said Howell. "Thou knowest now by thy own senses that such things are."

"Aye, I have seen more than ever thou hast seen."

"Canst not say that, sweetheart. I remember I was

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once in a field with Cornelius; we were picking blackberries, you understand, snip, snap, hither and thither, and all at once—Oh, Lord Almighty!—I saw a most beautiful little castle; it was no higher than that," holding his hand above his head as he squatted upon the ground. "There were three little towers with flags waving from them, and a splendid flight of broad steps led up to the door where a little man was standing who beckoned to me—thus. Oh, the beautiful place! I turned round and, 'Cornelius,' I shouted, 'bloody Cornelius, come here.' And when I turned again—thus—the castle had disappeared. But if I had not called Cornelius," added Howell sadly, "for sure I would have become a millionaire."

"Thou hast but thyself to blame, lad," said Uncle Adam. "Thou shouldst have known better than to drive the good gentle people away with thy swearing and cursing. Hadst thou blessed Cornelius all might have been well."

"Perhaps," said Eldorai; "but the boy should not have called Cornelius at all. The little people choose whom they will favour, and to call another to share the fortune offends them. Dost remember the 'elephant girl'?"

"You mean the girl at Tyn-y-vawr, her that was born with pig's ears, grunting like a pig?" asked Rosaina. "Did she lose her fortune? I thought that she was of kin to the fairies?"

"So her mother said. She always declared that she

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was a changeling—but there—before the child was born the mother was half-crazed and used to associate with pigs, which would account for it. But however that may be, the girl went down to the well one day and washed her eyes. When she looked up again she saw before her a great sheet full of golden sovereigns. She ran to call her mother, and when they returned together they found naught but a pile of hayseed on the sheet."

"I know a place in Anglesey where the little people were often seen," said old Henry. "The old women of the countryside used to go out before sunrise and when the sun was setting and sit on stools waiting to see which side of the house they would appear, and the farmer would drive the milch cows out to pasture in the same field where they had been seen walking, and after grazing there the blessed creatures would return in the evening with the milk dropping from their udders upon the road. I have heard my father tell how he himself used to see the little people dancing. The first time he saw them he had gone out before sunrise one morning and was passing through a valley when he came upon the prettiest sight he had ever seen—hundreds of little raia and raunia dancing together most beautifully. He returned to the place at sunset and saw them dancing again. And often at sunrise and at sunset he went to watch them while we remained in that place; but he never told anyone about them until long after. And going at noonday to the spot where

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they had danced he found the grass all worn away in the shape of a ring. And that was the luckiest farm in the whole country; never did ill fortune come nigh it."

"Aye, truly we know that they bring good luck," said Rosaina. "My mother has often said that she has seen the Tylwyth Teg and their appearance has always heralded something fortunate, has it not, daddy?"

"Aye," replied the old man, "but there—it is many years, twenty—aye, or thirty—since she has spoken of them; the country is getting crowded and the people rough, so the little folk are being driven away. I believe the last time that she saw them was at Cefn Ddu in Anglesey."

"It was not so long ago, daddy, for I remember it. —Daia," she addressed her mother, who had just ascended the steps from the farm and joined the group by the fire, "dost mind the place where thou didst last see the good people, the place where there were graves cut in the rock beneath the house, and where there was the nun's ghost that would always follow me?"

"The last time," said the old woman, "yes, it was the last time." She seemed disinclined to be communicative.

"The little rauni believes in the Tylwyth Teg now," said Uncle Adi, "she wants to hear about them."

"Best leave them in peace, leave them in peace," muttered the old woman.

"I'll tell thee of the first time I saw trace of their handiwork," said Eldorai; "it will show thee that thou must not speak of their most trifling gifts if thou

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wouldst retain them. I was a young woman, a month married, and I went one morning into an old barn near where we were lodging to get some rotten beams for firewood, and there, laid out along the rafters, was a row of the prettiest little prints of butter ever seen. I called my husband, 'Come here, see the butter,' but when he came there was no butter to be seen."

"So thy chance of growing fat on fairy food was lost," said Uncle Adam.

"Perhaps it was all for the best," remarked Howell, and a laugh passed round the circle, for Eldorai was plump.

Then Betsy spoke again: "Daia, we have seen their works, but has anyone seen the good people themselves since our grandad's time?"

"Thou hast been told that I have seen them. Walking in the fields they would follow me, and they would smile and wave their hands. Many and many a time they made as they would speak to me, but I lost them always when they came close."

"In what guise did they appear to thee, Syforella?" asked Eldorai.

"As raia and raunia; the little ladies wore red or white frocks and beautiful cloaks; their feet were tiny, tiny and most daintily shod; their hair was dressed most elaborately; they carried wands in their hands. The men wore green tail-coats with grey knee-breeches and their hair was powdered white."

"I heard a minister preach about the good people

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once," said Uncle Adi, "it was in a chapel that a farmer invited me to attend."

"What did he know about the good people?" asked the old woman scornfully.

"He said that there are three classes of people in the world—we who live upon the earth, the Tylwyth Teg who live beneath us, and the dead who live beneath again. And he said to the people sitting in the chapel, 'If you do not believe in the little people below, how can you believe in the great One above? Neither you nor I have seen Him, any more than any of us have seen the fairies. I tell you the truth, there are fairies as true as there is a God above us. If you cannot believe in the fairies you cannot believe in the King above, for you cannot see either, you have only heard talk of both."

"He was a wise man," said the old woman, "he knew more than you would expect from a gaujo."

"And he was right," said Roddy sagely, "that is where they do live."

"Bless the boy, what dost thou know about them?"

"I heard of a farmer in a far-off time who caught one, and as he held him in his hand the little man looked at him and, 'Let me go,' he said, 'I can do nothing for thee here; thou wilt never be fortunate if thou dost keep me prisoner. I live beneath you, also my people, and you tread upon us every day.' And the farmer did not hear anything more, for he looked down on the ground and the little gentleman jumped away, but there was always good luck on that farm."

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CHAPTER XV

"UNTO US A CHILD IS BORN"

ALICE WOOD was sitting alone in the darkest corner of the empty barn scowling and clenching her hands in the intervals between wild fits of weeping. Betsy entered, put down her basket in her own "liberty," and, taking some sewing, was turning to join the circle around the evening fire outside, when she noticed the miserable figure. She crossed the barn and laid her hand on the girl's shoulder.

"What is the matter, Ally? Thou didst not go out with thy basket this morning. Rosaina and I have had good luck to-day; shouldst have been with us. Hast idled here all the time? Art ill?"

Alice shook off her hand roughly. "I have good cause to be miserable; Harry has gone away and left me."

Betsy realised the tragedy; she knew that there had been much love-making between the two.

"Perhaps he will return," she said, adding eagerly, "Thou canst compel him; remember what our phuri dai told us the other evening; ask thy own mother."

"I do not want him back," cried Alice passionately, "I will never speak to him again, but—but——"

"Well?"

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"I must have a father for my child."

"Well?" said Betsy again.

"I have looked at no other man, no other is my friend. How all will mock at me, deserted before my child is born!"

She rolled upon the floor in a paroxysm of rage and grief.

An old Gypsy woman entered the barn—Rubina, Ally's mother. She looked at the distraught girl.

"Art weeping for Harry?" she jeered; then she dragged her on to her feet. "What ails thee, daughter? Thy man has left thee. True. Dost wish to bring him back? He is worthless, but there are potent spells. Go, seek advice from thy great-aunt."

"I do not want him back," cried the girl. "I will never see him again; he has left me to be scorned in my hour of need."

"Chut," said the old woman coolly. "It is not yet too late to avoid the scorn; father thy child upon another man."

Ally looked up hopefully, then fell to weeping anew.

"No other man has had aught to do with me; no other man desires me."

"Truly thou dost look very undesirable at present, daughter: thy face is swollen with crying. But listen to my words and a man shall have desire of thee this very night. Many men of our race are here; a dance is to be held in the great barn this evening. There thou shalt make thy choice. Go, calm thyself, wash

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away all traces of tears, and attire thyself bravely for the dance."

The old woman left the barn and Alice seized Betsy's arm, gripping it so that she bruised the flesh.

"I loved Harry, I loved him; I believed my love had turned to hate, but at the thought of giving myself to another man, I know that it is not so. But I must, I will do it; my child shall not know his mother was deserted before his birth. Leave me now, Betsy vach, I will wash and come to the fire directly."

The great barn, soon to be filled with the harvest, was crowded that evening. Besides the large band of Welsh Gypsies who were lodging in the smaller barn, the dance was attended by a party of English Gypsy Hernes and Lockes who, touring the country in their living-wagons, had reached the neighbourhood the previous day, so that the Gypsies completely swamped the farmer's household and the gauje visitors. The addition of the English Gypsy element made the festivity more riotous than usual and much whisky was drunk, and amidst it all Alice appeared the gayest of the gay.

Half-way through the evening, she drew Betsy aside.

"My dai has told me of the spell; I am about to make trial of it now." She took a darning-needle from the front of her bodice.

"What art thou going to do?" whispered Betsy nervously.

"Thou wilt see. I have not yet made choice of a

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lover. Who wouldst thou select? What sayest thou to Harry there?"

"Oh, Alice, no, no. Thou knowest that he loves Maria and she him, thou wouldst not ruin their lives with thy spell?"

"Why should I care? My happiness is gone. Someone has stolen it. However, I will leave the choice to chance."

She ran the needle deep into her arm just below the elbow and rushed in among the dancers, twirling wildly alone; she flung her arm aloft until it brushed against a man's face, leaving a little smear of blood.

The dance, growing ever more and more noisy, was kept up all through the night. Several times Betsy noticed Alice, wild with excitement, dancing with the tall English Gypsyman whose face her bloody arm had touched.

As Betsy, in company with others, was leaving the barn at daybreak, she heard screams and cursing. Ally and her tall partner were fighting; men and women interfered and the pair were dragged apart. Then Ally, panting and dishevelled, made public the intercourse that had taken place between them before the quarrel. The man did not contradict her statement, which established his responsibility for the paternity of a child should she bear one.

The next day saw Ally pale, exhausted and red-eyed. But she took up her basket and set out hawking as usual.

"Thou dost look tired out," said Betsy, as they went along the road together. "Why dost not rest to-day?"

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"I must work, bita gauji; I will soon have a child to provide for, Harry's child, though to all but thee I acknowledge another as its father. Say, Betsy, dost know that urchos?"

"He was one of the Hernes, that is all I know. Ally, Ally, didst truly let that stranger man have to do with thee, and thou still lovest Harry—how couldst thou?"

"It was no disgrace; he was a kaulo, though an English one, and truly 'twas a good evening's work, for now no one can throw scorn upon me or upon my child; the urchos has acknowledged him, and all saw the quarrel between us, and that it was I that left him in anger. We part here, Betsy; thou must go and attend the old woman, I will tell many fortunes to-day and be rewarded with much money."

She turned away into a by-road. Betsy, the gauji, marvelled as she watched her go alone on her way with swinging stride and head erect, facing the future gallantly with a laugh on her lips.

"That is a true kauli," said Syforella, when Betsy joined her. "Harry is a weak fool, running to another's bidding. Alice will make a worthy wife and mother."

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CHAPTER XVI

THE DANCE

"Ah, Mari, we are glad to see thee!" exclaimed the mistress of a prosperous farm in Merionethshire, as the old woman, followed by Betsy, entered her kitchen.

"We can go into the great barn?"

"Surely," answered the farmer himself, "but it is full of sacks and potatoes; I will send down and get it cleared."

"And who may this be? I have not seen her with thee before," asked his wife, looking at Betsy.

"She is my new daughter-in-law, my son Howell's wife; she was reared as a house-dweller, but she is coming nicely to our ways." Betty flushed with pride. "Not that she will ever make a real kauli," added the old woman.

"We have no fresh bread, Mari," said the farm-mistress; "we bake to-morrow; here is oat-cake."

She handed a great platter heaped up with the cakes to Betsy, and further loaded her with a large pat of butter and a piece of bacon. "I will send you down some new milk at milking-time," she promised.

"Some cream for me," said Syforella, "I like a drop of cream in my tea."

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"It shall be sent. Henry will come and play for us this evening?"

"We will all come."

After a generous tea in the barn, the Gypsies made ready for an evening of festivity. Word came to them that the farmer had sent messengers far and wide over the countryside to summon old and young alike to the dance. In company with her sisters-in-law Betsy spent a long time arraying herself carefully in her very best attire. When she was ready, old Ellen called her:

"Come here, daughter, while I inspect thee."

She ran her hands over the girl, beginning with her elaborately-braided hair. When she reached her feet she grunted disapproval.

"Canst not dance in those thick shoes, girl."

"I possess no others, phuri dai; I have always danced in them."

"Aye, doubtless thou canst stamp about with the farm boys—and yet thou hast a slender little foot were it properly shod; it is the very spit of thy grandmother's. Ei daudi, but she was a beautiful dancer. When she went up to the gentry's houses wearing her little pair of shoes that she had made for herself out of an old red coat that a soldier gave her, and danced while her brother played the harp, the ladies and gentlemen would all come out to watch and they would give her a fistful of gold. But thou wilt never be like her, girl."

"Never trouble for that, pirani," said Howell, "it

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is better to be thyself than thy grandmother over again; the old people would have naught new in the world."

"True, boy," she answered fiercely, "we would not, but the old people and the old ways have gone for ever; they were good times, we will not see their like again."

Howell laughed. "To-day is good enough for me, phuri dai. Come, Betsy, we are all ready for the dance now."

"Give me thy arm, girl," said the old woman, "and we will go to the farm."

As the Gypsies had purposely delayed until the rest of the company had assembled, the room was crowded when they entered, and their little procession was greeted with acclamations and cries of welcome. First came the musicians: Henry, the old woman's brother Adam, and young Dolphus carried harps; old Jeremiah, Mat, Howell and two of their cousins, fiddles; they were followed by the rest of the men, and the women and girls, all prepared to dance and enjoy an evening of festivity. The children had been put to bed in the barn early in the evening. Escorted by their host and hostess the players took their places at one end of the room while the company formed themselves into the long lines of a country-dance.

Dance succeeded dance the long night through, and dawn was already bright when the musicians at last put up their instruments. Old Henry, the acknowledged leader of the band, placed his tall silk hat crown

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downwards upon the floor and it was soon well filled with silver, each departing guest dropping a coin into it as he passed.

It was daylight when they reached the barn and bed; but what matter for that, since they could lie abed till midday, did they wish?

Dances at the farm were not the only nocturnal amusements. The younger members of the band made merry among themselves and often sat up half the night romping after their elders had gone to bed.

One night they brought out the donkeys and held a circus. Reuben was riding round and round, triumphantly standing barefoot upon a donkey's back, when his foot slipped and amid shouts of laughter he rolled upon the ground. Old Henry, awakened by the noise, rushed out from the barn brandishing a great stick. "I'll murder the lot of you!"

Away ran performers and spectators helter-skelter, and after them the old man; suddenly he tripped and fell over one of the donkeys which had taken the opportunity to lie down.

"The devil," cried the old man in affright, "I have fallen over the devil!" while the onlookers rocked with mirth.

And so carelessly and light-heartedly the rest of the golden summer was passed. The farms where the Gypsies were not sure of a welcome were very few; spacious and comfortable barns were open to them; there were sticks for their fires, forage for their horses

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and donkeys, and plenty of milk, porridge, butter, bacon and home-baked loaves for themselves. If hay-making was in progress they would stay for a week and all take part in the work; when the harvests were cut men and women helped to bind the corn and glean, while the children picked stones from the fields.

And one night Betsy shyly told Howell of her hope and expectation that their child would soon be born. Howell rejoiced greatly with her, and the following morning their joy was shared by all their companions; but Betsy chafed sorely under the restrictions laid upon her by the old woman. Henceforth she might not cook nor touch the food or anything connected with it; she might not even wash the dishes or table-cloths. A cup, plate, spoon, knife and fork were set apart for her use, and any other member of the tribe who used them would become unclean. The first night after the old woman had explained to her the taboo under which she lay, she cried bitterly at what seemed to her isolation and degradation.

"Art ill? Dost cry because of the coming little one?" asked Howell anxiously.

"I am to be treated as an outcast," sobbed Betsy.

"Silly girl, thou art cherished as the mother of my child, but at present thou art as one that is ill, and so must not touch the food of the healthy."

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CHAPTER XVII

THE GYPSIES FIND A LOST TREASURE AND DECAMP

BETSY was sitting in the sunshine beside the camp fire busily sewing at a new shirt for Howell. It was a grand shirt of black and white plaid. She had put her best stitching into the seams, and was now embroidering the front and fixing the little steel buttons which were to form the fastenings. The noontide was very hot and still; the sun shone brilliantly, just shadowed occasionally for a moment by a gauzy cloud floating slowly across his face; tiny farmyard sounds from the far side of the barn seemed startlingly loud amid the general silence.

After a long trek, when they had crossed two mountain ranges, the entire company, women as well as men, were spending a quiet day. Most had risen late, some had only just breakfasted and all were now sitting idly in the sunshine. But Betsy sewed; she had never spent a really lazy hour in her busy little life; idle hands wearied her. Rosaina sat with her hands in her lap and watched.

"Thou art making that shirt very beautiful," she said, "but what wilt thou say if Howell tears it?"

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Betsy laughed merrily. "I suppose that I will be cross, and then mend it; thou art doing nothing, Rosie."

Rosaina yawned and stretched herself. "I do not want to do anything; canst never sit still and do nothing, Betsy?"

"I do not like wasting my time."

"I am not wasting my time," said Rosaina indignantly, "I am resting and enjoying myself."

Howell strolled up to the two girls. "Hast got any tobacco, little wife?"

She drew a small piece of twist from her pocket.

"Is that all?"

"All I have got; thou hadst a large packet yesterday, Howell."

"Well, it has gone now and I must have more; wilt go to the shop and get me some, sweetheart?"

"By and by," answered Betsy, "it is so hot now and I want to finish this; then I must go for some tea and sugar."

"Do not be long, there are only two or three pipefuls here," said Howell discontentedly.

"The farmer has been talking and talking away to our dai for long enough," observed Rosaina, "he seems to be cross."

"You have not, none of you, disturbed any of his things?" queried the old man anxiously.

"Sure, no," answered Reuben. "Neither man, woman, child, dog nor donkey has quitted the field this morning. He has gone away now and here comes

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the old woman. What did the farm khereskero want, daia?"

"He does not like us to have a fire here; the ground is very dry, and the hayricks are close by. I have promised that we will extinguish it; do so, boy."

"Daudi," said Rosaina, "we must boil the kettle."

"Go to the cottage yonder, girl; the woman there will surely let thee use her fire."

Half an hour later, Betsy rolled up her work and set out for the village; Rosaina, carrying a kettle, accompanied her as far as the cottage. It was much farther to the village than she had thought. When she returned to the camp laden with parcels, hot and tired, she found Rosaina already making tea.

"I have used all the boiling water," she told her; "thou wilt have to get another kettleful for thy teapot, Betsy."

"The woman at the cottage will let me boil it?"

"No, she will not, not unless thou dost give her a spoonful of tea; but here, give her this, she will not know the difference."

And Rosaina took some used leaves from the teapot and spread them out in the sun to dry. They soon curled and shrivelled up, and armed with them Betsy went across the field and knocked at the cottage door.

A quavering voice bade her enter. She did so and found the cottage tenanted by an old, old man and his equally old wife. It was impossible to guess at their ages, they looked stranded on this life, forgotten by

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death; they sat without moving, doubled up in two armchairs opposite each other, one on either side of an enormous fire. In a querulous voice the old woman demanded the intruder's business. Betsy stated her want and presented the spoonful of dried tea-leaves, which were greedily accepted; then she made up the fire, put on her kettle and, squatting down beside the hearth, waited for it to boil.

"Thou art not a Gypsy," said the woman suddenly.

"My mother is, and I am married to one."

"A bad restless life."

"I like travelling about," answered Betsy.

"So I thought when I was a maiden, living in the old house yonder that is now the farm; but for sixty odd years I have lived in this cottage, and for five I have not left this chair by day or night."

Betsy shivered. "Thou dost not live here alone with the old man?"

"Our granddaughter comes once in the day to bring us food and make up the fire."

The kettle boiled and Betsy sprang to her feet.

"Fill my teapot," said the old woman.

Betsy felt some remorse as she poured boiling water over the already-used tea-leaves, but she said nothing, and taking her kettle went to rejoin her companions.

"They say at the farm that that couple are misers and terribly rich," said Rosaina. "Didst notice that they were both rolled round and round in blankets? Those blankets are just stuffed full of gold pieces."

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"She looks like an old witch," said Betsy. "I wonder if she is one."

"No, no," said Syforella, decidedly, "there is no witchcraft in her at all; she is naught but a stupid old woman, who has given up all the joys of life and sits in one place for ever hoarding gold; better far be dead. God preserve us from such a life."

The voice of one of the men who had been sauntering about on the far side of the hedge in company with a little bitch was heard calling, "Phuri dai, phuri dai, come here, I have something to show thee."

Syforella arose and went to him; their voices were heard fitfully through the hedge in excited murmurs.

"I wonder has the ass foaled; I did not expect it for a week, but it might be," said old Henry; he got up and went into the next field, followed by most of the company.

Roddy, who had run first, burst out laughing. "What is the old woman doing? She is half through the hedge."

And indeed the others laughed also. The old woman was kneeling on the ground, her head and right arm hidden deep in the ditch. She extracted herself and rose to her feet.

"Much treasure is hidden here, children; come, let us go and tell the farmer."

"The bitch found it," said the man excitedly. "She burrowed into the hedge after rabbits. I took out some stones and a clod or two of earth to help her. Then she brought out two rabbits. I peered into the hole and,

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daude, I found something. I pulled out a large silver teapot, and there is a great store of silver things hidden there."

"Put some earth back into the hole, boy," said the old woman, "and then come to the farm with me."

"There is a legend of treasure hidden somewhere hereabouts, I believe," said the farmer. "I am a newcomer, but the old woman in the cottage talks of it; her ancestors lived here in past days. Come, show me the treasure and I will put it in safety."

As they turned to the field with the farmer, they met the old woman who had not left her chair for five years, hobbling excitedly along with the help of two sticks.

"It is found at last," she cried in a cracked, high-pitched voice. "Long has it been looked for. My grandfather was rich, but though the house was searched when he died, nothing could be found. They said he hid it in a ditch; now it is found and it belongs to me."

"We will see about that," muttered the farmer; "the land belongs to me. Where is the place you saw it?"

The spot was pointed out, and the farm labourers accompanying the farmer began to dig. They dug for an hour, by which time the whole hedge was uprooted, but they did not unearth the treasure.

"You have stolen it from me," screamed the old woman to the farmer.

"On the contrary," retorted the farmer hotly, "you have stolen it from me."

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The wrangle continued, growing more and more acrimonious.

"The devil must have eaten them," suggested a Gypsy man. All the Woods were listening to the dispute with great amusement.

"A Gypsy has taken them, more like," said one of the farm men.

This remark led to a second dispute, which soon threatened to become a fight. Syforella authoritatively called off her party. "Let us be going, mates; leave the gauje to quarrel among themselves," she said contemptuously.

But when they reached the barn, her tone changed to one of anxiety. "We will pack and leave this place, I like not the whisperings of the country folk."

In half an hour's time they were on the road once more. When the farmer, angry and hot after his dispute with the old woman, came to interrogate them, he found the barn deserted.

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CHAPTER XVIII

THE PHURI DAI

ABOUT this time Syforella and her family were rejoined by Ellen Wood, the oldest living member of the clan, grandmother to Howell and Betsy's great-aunt. Of very small stature, with tiny waist and hands and feet, her mien was regal and commanding. She was quite blind, but showed no other sign of age—her hair, elaborately arranged in ringlets around her face, was black and abundant, her movements lithe and active as those of a girl.

Betsy was presented, and she passed her hands over the girl's face and figure. The inspection was apparently satisfactory, for she said:

"Thou shalt come to guide me to-morrow, child, unless perchance thou art able to go hawking alone?"

"She has taking manners, and so often finds a ready market for her wares," Syforella answered for her, "but she cannot inspire fear or respect, so is useless at the dukkering; she generally accompanies me."

"Well, she shall come with me to-morrow," replied the grandmother.

The next morning Betsy set out with the old woman. She was directed to leave her own hawking-basket at

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home, in order that she might carry that of her companion, who walked briskly forward, holding her arm for guidance, not support.

"Dost remember thy grandmother, girl?" she asked presently.

"No, she died before I was born, but my eldest brother, Bill, does."

"Bill, ach!" said the old woman; "I saw him once only, gaujo that he is, unworthy of the race from which he sprung."

"True," agreed Betsy, "he thinks more of the gauje than of the kaule."

The old woman who, as usual, was smoking, expressed her contempt by spitting emphatically. "Pah! that ever my sister should own such a grandson! But thou seemest a worthy descendant, little girl, and hast chosen the better part. Thou hast not been endowed with the Gypsy gift of insight, they tell me."

"I fear not, though I have tried, and once I was rewarded with a sovereign," and Betsy told of her first attempt at fortune-telling.

Presently Ellen halted. "There is a village just beneath us now, girl, minaw?"

"Yes, there is," said Betsy, amazed at her wonderful sense of locality, for they had walked at least five miles across the hills.

"Lead me down, girl, and set me at one end of the village street; thou shalt follow behind, out of earshot, but near enough to hear should I call for my basket."

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Betsy led her to the first house and then stood still watching the old woman feel her way down the street. Some doors she passed after running her fingers contemptuously over their surface; at others she tapped and was received with smiles of welcome or scarcely-veiled fear, but always with respect and awe. Every now and then she entered a house, when the door was carefully closed behind her.

A group of girls and children collected in the street, and after Ellen had spent some ten minutes within a gloomy, unkempt-looking cottage, one of them timidly approached Betsy.

"Do you think that she will give Sarah Grace any help?"

"What is her trouble?" asked Betsy.

"Her lover has gone away and left her and her three-months-old baby; she wants a spell to make him return and keep his promise of marriage."

"I cannot say what my grandmother will do, but I know she is very, very wise," answered Betsy, who had not yet grown accustomed to her new position of acolyte to the high priestesses of magic throughout the countryside. She felt that she ought to surround them with an atmosphere of mystery, but scarcely knew how to set about the task. To her relief she was spared further questioning on this occasion, for the cottage door was thrown open and Ellen herself appeared on the threshold and summoned her follower.

"Did we pass any rowan saplings on the way hither?"

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Betsy considered, then answered, "Yes, there are some on the side of yonder slope."

"Good," said the old woman, and turned to the girl within the house. "Follow me and bring thy child with thee." Then taking Betsy by the arm, "Lead me to the rowan trees."

They retraced their steps up the hillside, followed by Sarah Grace carrying her child and, at a little distance, by the women and children who had collected in the road. The old woman turned and waved the crowd back with her stick.

"Follow us not," she commanded, "the blessed spells are for those only that they concern."

Even the impulsive children stood still, cowed, and they continued their way unattended and in silence.

"Here are the ash trees," said Betsy, at last, after they had walked for about half a mile.

"It is well," said the old woman, "time would have been short had we gone much farther, for all must be completed ere midday. Find me a straight, healthy sapling."

Betsy did so, and when Ellen had inspected and approved of her choice she told her to stand back, and summoned the girl.

"Split this stem down even to the root. Now pass thy child through the cleft thrice, calling upon his father to return to thee."

The girl, white-faced but determined, obeyed.

"Take the garter from thy left leg and with it bind the stem firmly, so that it will grow together once more."

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Betsy held the child while this was accomplished.

"Tell no one. If the father of thy child is to return to thee, he will come presently; even as the cleft stem unites so will ye two."

"If!" cried the girl; "but is it not certain now that he will come?"

"Nothing can be made certain," replied the old woman solemnly, "but certain it is that wherever he may be, far away across the great mountains or over the sea, he hears thy call and feels the power of the ash upon him, and if thou hast any place whatever in his heart he must respond."

She went on her way and Betsy followed, leaving Sarah Grace, her child in her arms, gazing thoughtfully at the split and bandaged sapling.

They went on farther to another village, and though the contents of Ellen's basket did not diminish, the money pocket beneath her apron grew weighty with silver and the begging sheet, slung on Betsy's back, full of a selection from the best of the housewives' stores of pies and cakes. After a brief rest in the village inn, they set out on their homeward way, and when they repassed the split rowan Betsy returned to the subject of the spell.

"I hope the man will come back to Sarah Grace and her poor little baby. Did he truly hear her call, puraia?" she asked timidly.

"I have said so," answered the old woman, and Betsy dared question her no further.

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But she still felt incredulous, and that evening she consulted Rosaina.

"I have never seen it tried, but I have known my grandmam do many powerful things; she knows much and there is great strength in the rowan. When Hannah Herne's lover deserted her, she gathered rowan twigs and made her bed of them, and after she had slept upon them for three nights, repeating the right words each night, he came back and all was as before between them. And my mam sometimes gives rowan leaves to our girls if they have been jilted by their sweethearts."

"Yes," said Betsy doubtfully, "but I do not understand."

"Understand! What dost thou want to understand? The magic of the rowan is something that is like the sun or the wind or the rain; we do not know any more about them and never will."

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CHAPTER XIX

THE STRENGTH OF THE ASH

EVERY now and then the women had a day to themselves. They would stay at home in the camp while the men went about their businesses, fishing, or horse-dealing, or musical conviviality. On these occasions there was much conversation, and from the old women Betsy learnt a wisdom hitherto undreamt of. They spoke with a strange freedom to each other of the men and of their relations with them. For a Gypsy woman to have casual intimacy with a gaujo was an uncommon occurrence and met with disapproval, but that, Betsy discovered, was due to race exclusiveness; for there was no disapprobation for her who lured another woman's husband to be her lover for a season, and the forsaken spouse, after a transport of rage and grief, would usually set herself to win another mate. But although these practices were rather admired as feats of skill than condemned, most of the family elected to live faithfully with the lover of their choice.

It was ten o'clock in the morning. Blind Ellen, who cut out and made her own dresses wonderfully well by sense of touch, sat cross-legged, sewing, in her own corner of the great barn. Betsy, who had already brushed

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and made tidy the corner allotted to herself and Howell, squatted beside her, hemming the many flounces that were to adorn the skirt of the new dress.

"The feel of the silk is good," said the old woman in Romani, in which language Betsy could now chatter freely. "Thou art sure, girl, that the colour is pretty? I would not be clad in gloom."

Betsy assured her that it was bright and cheerful, as indeed it was, being a tartan in which red predominated.

"The choice is difficult when one must trust the eyes of others," said the old woman. "Give me thy work, girl." She ran her sensitive fingers along the hem. "It is well done, bita gauji, thou dost use thy needle better than the other girls—thou art like thy grandmother, they tell me. Ei, daudi—my sister Baina and I were as twins, so thou must be like me, but I am blind and very old and thou art young."

"No one would think thou wert blind, phuri dai," said the girl, "for thy eyes look clear and bright, and as for being old, thy waist is as slim and thy hair as black as my own."

The old Gypsy sat still more upright. "Continue thy hemming, daughter; I would have that skirt flounced from my waist to my feet ready for the merry-making to-morrow; the bodice I will attend to myself. I will never grow old, chai, and the men will never tire of me; I will be as attractive when I am laid in my coffin as when I was thy age."

They continued to sew in silence for some time.

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"The barn is quiet now, girl; have all made their beds?"

"Aua, phuri dai, the sun is shining and they have gone outside."

The old woman went to the door of the barn, where the women were idly chatting.

"Come, girls, let us sit under the hedge, and Mary shall read the Bible to us. Bring thy sewing with thee, Betsy."

When they were all, young and old alike, seated around the old woman beneath the shelter of a tall hedge, Mary, Laija's gauji wife, the only member of the family who could read, brought her Welsh Bible and asked, in that language, "What shall I read, old woman?"

"Read about our dear Lord."

Mary opened the book at random at the eighth chapter of St. John, and read the story of the woman taken in adultery. "And Jesus said, Neither do I condemn thee; go thy way, from henceforth sin no more."

There was a moment's silence when Mary ceased reading; it was broken by the old woman.

"See now, girls, our dear Lord allowed harlots to be; 'I do not condemn thee,' so the blessed Man said. But mark, girls, and remember always, that if we married women were to give ourselves up to other men than our husbands, we would become mochade lubnia, and greater sinners than this harlot whom our Lord did not condemn."

The old woman puffed solemnly at her pipe. Betsy

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thought of the many tales she had heard whispered concerning the luring away of men by Nelly, but none of the group spoke until the old woman again removed her pipe from her mouth to ask Mary to read the tale of Joseph.

Rosaina pulled Betsy by the arm. "Come," she whispered, "I have something to show thee."

The two girls stole quietly away to the barn together, and Rosaina began to rummage among blind Ellen's possessions.

"Leave her things alone," said Betsy, "she will be angry."

Rosaina drew a little package from the bundle and threw it across to her companion.

"Look, I thought that she was up to something last night."

"It is only a sock," said Betsy.

Rosaina unrolled it and some sprigs of rowan fell out.

"A man's sock with bits of witch tree in it; she is up to something evil. Who does the sock belong to? I know not, but whosoever he is he will leave all to-night and come to Nelly. It is thus that she lures men from their wives."

"It cannot be; remember what she said just now."

Rosaina laughed. "What matter for that, posh gauji? She spoke that way then, she thought this way last night; she will think this way again to-night. Art thou ever of the same mind? Put back the sock before she returns. There is much witchcraft in our phuri dai."

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Sitting round the fire that evening before the return of the men, Rosaina, greatly daring, spoke of the mountain ash.

"Canst bring men to thee by its power, canst not, phuri dai?"

The old woman was unperturbed. "In truth, daughter, that is so, as also a man may draw a woman to him. Many a wife has been compelled to leave her husband by the power of the ash, though, mind you, the strength of the leaves in weak or frightened hands is naught."

"No one could ever make me leave my husband," said Betsy.

"Thou dost boast in ignorance, little lady," answered Ellen. "Take heed to thyself; if any man wishes to possess thee and knows the spells—as happily for us women few men do—thou mayest find art no stronger than others. But there, thou needst not fear greatly; a man lacking the aid of a woman in these matters is of small account, and skilful women are not numerous nowadays; the young are unlearned in these things, while the old are jealous of their power and give their help and secrets seldom."

"Tell us, phuri dai, tell us how we may bring men to us," cried a voice, and all leant eagerly towards the old woman, who replied:

"How do I know that young and foolish girls will not abuse such powers? 'Such things are sinful,' my sister Baina used to say, and mayhap she was right. However, I will teach you how you shall

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make your own lovers return to you should they prove false."

The old woman, reluctant to part with any of her secrets, paused, and leaning forward raked over the glowing wood and cinders with a piece of stick. The flame she caused threw her face and figure into strong relief against the surrounding darkness. She looked a fitting custodian of the magic lore of centuries, and the group of young women and girls, familiar as they were with her, almost shrank away from the uncanny element which they had aroused. At last she began to impart the secret spell, speaking in a low monotone.

"When thy period of uncleanness is upon thee, go alone and cut a straight rod of rowan and enough twigs to make a fire. Kindle the fire in a secret place and, when the ashes are red hot, heat an iron skewer and with it hollow the rod. Then, speaking through the rod as though a trumpet, call upon thy lover to return to thee. I have never known man that could resist this call; but be sure, girls, that you really love the man and that he is worthy of your love before you force him, perhaps against his will, to return."

The monotone ceased, the flame in the fire flickered feebly and died away, leaving the circle in darkness.

"But the words, phuri dai, tell us the words of the call."

"The words!" she answered scornfully; "call to him from thy heart, girl, for that only will avail."

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CHAPTER XX

HOWELL'S FIGHT

How cold, how cold, blows the winter's night,
And how heavy fall the drops of rain,
I never, never had but one true love
And in the cold grave he is lain.

I'll do as much for my true love
As another fair maid may,
I'll sit and weep down by his grave
For a twelvemonth and a day.

When a twelvemonth and a day came of an end
To me my true love did appear.
"What makes you weep down by my grave,
As I can't get no rest here?"

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"One kiss, one kiss, from your lily white lips,
One kiss, that's all I pray."

"My lips, they are as cold as clay,
My breath smells heavy and strong,
If a kiss you will have from my lily white lips
In this world you will never live long.

"Fetch me a nut from a dungeon deep,
Water out of a stone,
Milk out of a fair maid's breast,
A maid that never was known."

"I can't get you a nut from a dungeon deep,
Nor water out of a stone,
Nor milk out of a fair maid's breast,
A maid that never was known."

"Then can't you hear that black cock crow?
The white cock never crew at all,
Then it's time for the dead to return to the grave
And the living to return to her home."

THOUGH the ruined ballad, which she had learnt from one of the English Hernes, was sombre, Betsy sang it gaily as she filled her apron with clusters of hedge-nuts. It was a sunny autumn morning, fleecy-white clouds were sailing swiftly across a sapphire sky and a crisp breeze tossed the leaves and twigs against her face as she struggled to bring some high boughs thickly laden with nuts within her reach. The world was happy and in high spirits to-day, she thought, and she herself was one of the happiest things upon it.

The Gypsies—still a large band—had returned to the neighbourhood of Yspytty Vach the previous evening and taken up their quarters in a large barn close to the

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lane where Betsy was nutting alone. Howell had gone with a message to a distant farm, but most of the men, after the long journey of the day before, were idling about; the women also were home-keeping, some washing, some sewing, others baking, while yet others, having, like Betsy, nothing particular on hand, were amusing themselves in various ways.

She had just succeeded in pulling down a large branch and was stripping off the nuts when, peering through the leaves, she saw Margot and Evan of the Three Trees Farm coming towards her. Now, though all the morning Betsy had been looking forward to showing herself among her old companions in her new position and married state, at sight of them a sudden wave of unaccustomed bashfulness overcame her and she remained motionless, hoping that she would be concealed by the nut trees. The hope, however, proved vain, for they called her name and rushed boisterously upon her; Margot seized her arm and dragged her from her hiding-place.

"Hello, Betsy, is that you? Come out. Look at her, Evan, the Gypsy bride."

Betsy blushed and wriggled.

"Let go my arm, Margot, you hurt me."

"Stand still then, we want to look at you. Now, tell us all about it."

"About what? What do you want to know?"

"All about thy marriage of course, stupid. Do you really live in a barn with the Gypsies, Betsy? How do

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you like it? Where is your husband? Is he one of those men over there?" and she looked curiously at the group of Gypsies gathered round the fire near by.

"Howell is not here at present," answered Betsy. "He went to Llanarmon this morning." Her shyness dropped from her, for their eager curiosity restored her, in her own mind, to the pose of an adventurous heroine. "I am very happy; I have travelled about, and oh, Margot, there is no kitchen to clean."

"Evan and I are going to be married next Tuesday," said Margot. "I say he only took me because he could not get thee, Betsy vach; but I do not mind; better before than after, I tell him, and I will see that he does not do any more philandering now."

Evan grinned sheepishly.

"I am sure he will not want to," said Betsy, "thou wilt make a first-rate farmer's wife, Margot; I do hope that thou wilt be happy."

"And thou must come to our wedding, though thou didst not ask me to thine; and do bring thy husband, Betsy. Dost think that he would play the fiddle for us?"

All through this conversation Betsy could hear the old woman talking away behind her, "Hark to the gauji chattering," but she took no heed.

"I daresay he will, if we are still near Yspytty Vach; I do not know how long we will stay though, we might——"

She was interrupted by the advance of the old woman.

"Come, girl, do not spend thy time chattering there." She seized her by the ear and led her away amid the

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laughter of the Gypsies and the open-mouthed astonishment of Margot and Evan.

When they reached the fire Betsy was released. She turned and faced her mother-in-law.

"Thou wouldst not dare to do that if Howell were here."

"Tut, tut, the lad spoils thee," answered the old woman. "I will speak to him of the matter when he returns. He would not wish his wife to be pleasuring with a stranger man."

Betsy passed the remainder of the day in tears, and was still sobbing when she ran to meet Howell on his return.

"Why, what is the matter, little wife?" he asked. "What have they been doing to thee?"

"Let the girl be," said his mother. "No one has done anything to her; she is crying because I would not let her stand talking and talking to a young gaujo she knows."

"By God's truth," cried Betsy, "that is a lie! I but spoke for a moment to Margot; thou knowest Margot of Three Trees Farm, Howell, and Evan, who is going to marry her. If thou dost not believe me, go and ask them; they have gone up to the farm. And thy mother dragged me away by the ear before them all! I am alone here with no one to protect me," she sobbed desolately.

Howell became white with anger. "No one to protect thee? But thou hast." He pulled off his embroidered holland smock and turned to the surrounding Gypsies.

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"Come on, all of you," he shouted. Old Henry came forward, but Howell folded his arms. "No, I cannot fight my father, but I will take on the rest of you one by one."

Betsy, who hated fights, ran away as he closed with his uncle Ned, and sat behind the barn trembling, with her fingers in her ears. In about half an hour Howell came to her. He had a black eye and a bloody nose; his smock coat and shirt were in ribbons.

"Get me water and a towel," he said. "I would wash."

"Where are the others?" faltered Betsy.

"They are packing; we will have the barn to ourselves directly."

Betsy brought water and a towel from the farm.

"But thy clothes?" she questioned him.

"That wild cat Ellen tore them into bits while I was fighting," said Howell.

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CHAPTER XXI

THE BIRTH OF BETSY'S CHILD

HOWELL and Betsy travelled alone for the few weeks that were left of the autumn, avoiding districts frequented by their clan. For the winter they settled themselves in a one-room cottage in Carnarvon.

Coming home from hawking one afternoon Betsy saw Syforella in the distance advancing towards her. She hurried into the cottage and breathlessly confronted her husband.

"Howell, thy mother is coming down the street!"

"No matter, come in and shut the door."

But Betsy went out again and stood in the doorway.

"Well, art thou going to say good afternoon to me?" said the old woman. She entered the house, followed by Betsy. "Living here?" she queried. Howell nodded.

"You need not be afraid," she continued. "I am not going to stay long; we have got a house in the next street. But thou, girl, mightst like to come out with me in the morning. Say, how hast thou prospered alone? Thou needst not answer; I can see thou dost still stand in need of example and instruction. Thou mayst call for me in the morning if thou wishest."

Betsy did call for her the next morning; she was too much afraid of her mother-in-law to slight her invitation. The old woman seemed glad of her company, and no word was spoken of the fight or of its cause.

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In the little one-roomed cottage at Carnarvon Betsy's child was born. Syforella, who had again taken her into favour, ushered the little dark-headed Gypsy into the world, and in a week's time the young mother was travelling the roads with her hawking basket on her arm and her son slung in her shawl.

He was a tiny doll-like child, and she found endless pleasure in tending him, and dressing him in the baby-clothes that she had prepared with loving care.

"He is small," said Syforella with brutal frankness, "and he has not a strong grasp upon life. Thou wilt have much trouble to rear him."

But all admired him. If the women to whom Betsy displayed him when she was on her business rounds did not think him so fine a child as their own fat bald-headed offspring, they could not but acknowledge that he was a pretty baby, with his finely-formed limbs, his dark eyes, and topknot of black hair.

Howell idolised him and would sit for hours nursing him, crooning over him and talking to him.

"We will take him to Yspytty Vach in the summer," said Betsy. "I want to show him to my mam."

But the wish was not to be gratified.

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CHAPTER XXII

BETSY BECOMES AN ACOLYTE TO THE FORTUNE-TELLERS

It was a fine dry spring of sunshine and the Gypsies took to the road early that year. Howell and Betsy, with their baby, rejoined the family, travelling with them in a great band round Anglesey; and, despite all her care, in a barn near Amlwch, Betsy's baby died.

She wept sorely when, after he had been buried, Syforella collected all his little clothes and burnt them.

"It is the custom," said Howell stolidly, when she begged him to interfere.

But she was gauji bred and it seemed like a second death for her child to have all tokens of his little life taken from her.

This year she found the life hard. Though still a favourite of the old woman, she was no longer the petted bita rauni of the tribe; at times she was even treated as a stranger and interloper. "Hush, be quiet," women talking together would whisper as she approached, "here comes the gauji." She, however, kept the friendship formed the previous summer, of her sister-in-law Rosaina, a girl of about her own age; and made that of Reuben's wife, Jane, a quiet girl who before her marriage had lived for some time as a maidservant in the houses of the gentiles. She often

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helped the latter with her two young children, carrying the toddling boy when they went together on their rounds, while the mother herself bore her baby.

And she had to work. Though in many respects the Gypsies lived a communal life, each little family provided the contents of their own cooking-pot, unless on occasions of great largess at some farmstead. And the burden of keeping the pot full for herself and her husband fell entirely upon Betsy. For days together Howell would idle in the camp, and though on others he would go out with his grinding barrow or fiddle and earn much money, he seldom handed any share of his gains to her; like most Gypsy men, he looked to his wife to provide their daily bread.

Betsy, to her great joy and pride, found herself equal to the task. She had pretty, shy manners, and being withal shrewd, soon proved herself a capable hawker, but as a drukerimangeri, despite her initial success, she failed. Her quarter, or perhaps three-quarter share of Romani blood (for her father might have been a Gypsy), had not endowed her with the self-confidence and the belief in her own power to foretell the future generally possessed by the full-blooded women of her race. She soon abandoned any attempt at fortune-telling and, as she was frequently chosen by her mother-in-law to accompany her on her rounds, an acolyte to the high priestess of the craft, was content to peddle her little wares to the household while the old woman spoke apart with one.

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Syforella, she learnt, did not only foretell the future; she also practised many charms and incantations to influence coming events, and secure good fortune to her patrons.

The two halted one afternoon outside the prosperous little inn at Menai Bridge; Syforella, a pace ahead of her companion, pushed open the door and entered the bar, where she called peremptorily for "Mrs. Williams." The buxom landlady hurried forward.

"Ah, Mari vach, and I was longing to see you."

She led the way into a comfortable kitchen and installed the old woman in an armchair beside the fire. Betsy followed and sat down timidly on a distant bench.

"It is a dusty day for walking, Mari vach, you will take a glass of ale now?"

"No," said the old woman, "no ale for me. I will take a little gin, and give some to the girl there, the white drink is good for women."

The landlady brought glasses and the gin and, sitting down beside Syforella, began to ask her advice and help. In common with the whole countryside, she believed in, and feared, the old woman's magic power. She talked volubly, words and sentences heaping themselves one upon another until the listener's brain reeled beneath the torrent. Life was lonely for a widow, she said, and she inclined towards a second marriage. A prosperous farmer had come wooing her for long, but he did no more than woo. How could she make his intentions certain and bind him to her?

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When at last she ceased speaking, there was a short silence, then Syforella spoke authoritatively:

"Bring in a cockerel."

Mrs. Williams went to the yard and returned with a protesting bird.

"Kill him, take out his heart, stick four needles in it, place it—still beating—between thy bare breasts against thy own heart, and call upon thy lover to come quickly as thy heart beats, if he loves thee, to come to thee this night."

The cockerel was killed upon the hearthstone and the rite performed; Betsy shivered when she saw its heart throbbing in the woman's hand; then the bloody thing disappeared beneath the landlady's ample bodice. The two women spoke for some minutes, Mrs. Williams, her hands tightly clasped together over her breasts and the heart, repeating invocations after the Gypsy.

At last Syforella said, "Show me now the heart."

When the landlady drew it from between her breasts she looked intently at it—it still throbbed faintly. She rose and nodded to the woman who, without a word, poured the contents of her purse into the Gypsy's hand. Syforella counted the money and transferred it to her capacious pocket, then signing to Betsy to follow her, left the room and the house.

As they went down the road a prosperous-looking farmer drove past them. The old woman pointed her forefinger at him.

"Dost see yonder man, girl? He makes haste to woo."

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CHAPTER XXIII

DEATH AND FUNERAL OF WILLIAM LEE

"We will see the Lees to-morrow," said Rosaina; "I met Esmeralda to-day, and they are staying by Rhyndwr; they have been there for a week now and cannot move because the old man is very ill."

"Old William?" asked Syforella.

"Yes."

"I do not love the English Gypsies, they are ruining the country for the old family, but William is a real old Gypsy and keeps true to his English Gypsy ideals. He is very ill, thou sayest?"

"Aye, like to die."

On the day following this conversation the old people and Rosaina, together with Howell and Betsy, journeyed, according to their plan, to the farmstead of Rhyndwr, where they joined Reuben and his family, already encamped in a barn close to the field in which the English Gypsy wagons were standing.

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Syforella, accompanied by Rosaina and Betsy, went at once to the field to offer her help and sympathy to the invalid and his relatives. But they learnt that the old Gypsy had died that morning. Dressed in his best clothes he lay in his fine living wagon; a smaller wagon and a tilt cart sheltered his widow, unmarried son and daughter, and two elder sons and their families. The women were weeping, the men idly smoking, while the awe-struck children played quietly about.

"We bury him in the churchyard in two days' time," said the eldest daughter-in-law. "You will all follow his coffin?"

Syforella, who had seated herself among the mourners by the fire, nodded assent; she pulled out her pipe, filled it, and smoked silently.

"Tick-tack, tick-tack," said the widow, "I hear it still; never will the sound quit my ears; tick-tack, all through the night, and then the death-bird screeched."

"Aye," said Syforella, "I also have heard the death-clock, and a weary sound it is to hear, and the cry of the birds that bodes death is still more weary."

"The bird screeched and my rom raised himself up on his bed as much as he could, dear soul, and then he fell back. Tick-tack, tick-tack, I heard once again, and henceforth all was still and I knew that my rom, God rest his soul, had left me."

"Do not, mam," wailed Esmeralda, "do not speak so any more."

"Let her be," said Syforella, "to speak eases the heart.

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She still hears the death omen; better she should say it aloud than inwardly."

"I'm feared," said Esmeralda, shivering, "oh! I'm feared."

"Let her be, girl, let her be," commanded the eldest son.

A silence fell again upon the group.

"Tick-tack, tick-tack," said the widow.

Out of respect to the dead man, all the Gypsies remained idle in their quarters for that day and the next. On the morning of the funeral they clad themselves in their best clothes to follow William Lee to his grave.

"Take heed to thy steps, Roddy, take heed," cried the old woman sharply, as the boy stumbled. She seized his hand and led him soberly along beside her.

"Let me go, phuri dai, I will walk quietly."

"I fear the omen of death."

"How, phuri dai?"

"Thou didst run and trip and nearly fall, boy. Knowest thou not that to fall when following a coffin bodes death to one of thy kin?—to thy phuri dad most like, for thou art a boy and he is the oldest man."

"Indeed, I did not know," said the boy gravely; "but see, I know and will remember now and walk carefully."

William Lee was laid to rest with all the ceremonies of the Church by the vicar of the parish in which he had died; all the Gypsies in the neighbourhood were

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present, and many country people drawn to the churchyard by the concourse.

When all was finished and the last sod smoothed upon his grave, they returned together to the field, and a wild scene of furious destruction followed.

His sons fiercely attacked his living wagon with hatchets, and piling the fragments in the midst of the field, set fire to them; when the bonfire was well alight, the women brought his fiddle, his clothes, van furniture, bedding, blankets, linen, and cast them into the flames, while others smashed crockery and, as far as they were able, ironware. Then his horse was led out and shot, and lastly the eldest son packed indestructible articles, jewellery, table silver, pots and pans, and the like, into a sack, which he sunk in the deepest part of the neighbouring lake.

The widow watched the destruction of all that made life comfortable unmoved, but Betsy looked on in horror.

"Why, why," she asked Howell that evening, "should all those good things be destroyed? It is wicked. How will the family live now?"

"I do not know," he replied, "but what matters it? They could not use what belonged to the dead."

"You all say so; so thou didst say when thy mother took away my baby's clothes; but oh! it is cruel, cruel, and stupidly, wickedly cruel."

"Hush," said Howell sharply, "they are right who call thee gori; no kauli would keep or wish to keep the possessions of the dead."

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"But what will become of the old woman?"

"She will live with her son for a time, until she earns enough to buy herself a new blanket."

"And she had everything comfortable. I do not care if I am no kauli, it is all wicked."

"Shut thy mouth," said Howell roughly, "and let me sleep."

The wind had arisen and howled round the barn and in through numerous chinks. Howell, tightly rolled in his blanket, slept comfortably, but Betsy shivered as she lay awake full of revolt against the day's proceedings. Her shrewd, domestic, matter-of-fact mind did not often worry itself about the customs and beliefs of her companions, but the cruelty of depriving the widow of all her household goods had stirred her deeply. She would have seen reverence for the dead in decent black clothes, hushed voices and mournful faces; she could find none in a wild orgy of destruction of the dead man's possessions.

"I cannot understand," she thought despondently; "is it true that I will never be a real kauli?"

The wind continued to howl and the Gypsies slept, and at last Betsy cuddled herself up in her blanket and, being tired and healthy, slept also.

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CHAPTER XXIV

THE WELL OF GLAN-Y-MOR

THE old woman came from the dusky interior of the barn into the morning sunlight which flooded the field, where Betsy was preparing breakfast, and sat down wearily by the fire.

"Thou art ill, daia?"

She groaned. "Aye, girl, the hand of my dear Lord is heavy upon me, my back opens and shuts with the pain."

"Lie down again, daia, and I will bring thee a dish of tea."

"Lie down," exclaimed the old woman fiercely, "lie down! No, bita gauji, only women in childbirth lie down among the kaule, and I am no house-dweller."

Betsy made ready the breakfast in silence and called Howell and his father; Rosaina was already eating with Mat and his family around another fire some few yards away.

After drinking two cups of tea, but refusing all food, Syforella roused herself.

"We will move to-day, children; I will go to the well at Glan-y-Mor, its waters will rid me of my pain."

"It is a long two days' journey," objected the old man.

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"I will find my cure there," answered Syforella, with decision. "Tell the others, Betsy, and then come and pack the wallets here where I can direct thee and see that all is done aright."

Packing the wallets before the old woman was a wearisome task, but at last everything was satisfactorily stowed away and the patient little donkeys loaded by Howell and his father. When Rosaina and Jane, the latter carrying her baby slung in her shawl, had started with their hawking baskets to follow a different route, the old woman seated herself upon one of the donkeys and set out upon the journey, Betsy walking alongside, while Henry and his sons brought up the rear with the pack animals.

At the first village they came to, Syforella called a halt and dismounted and, after sending on the men and donkeys, took Betsy's arm and walked up the street. The children that were playing about fled before her and hid themselves.

"See, Betsy vach, the folly of the gauje; the children here fear the kaule, and thy dai above all others; yet it is a full year since I wrought the baro manzin they think of."

She selected a cottage and rapped smartly upon the door; a young woman opened it.

"Thou hast returned," she cried joyfully. "Come in, come in, and sit down; see, here is my baby." She brought forward a toddling child of two years old. "She walks, Mari; see, she walks."

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"Thou didst apply the remedy as I directed?"

"Aye, that I did, every day until none was left; and how can we ever show thanks to thee, for now she is well and healthy?"

"Come, Betsy."

"You will take a cup of tea first?"

"No," said Syforella, "no."

The woman brought some eggs and offered them. "'Tis little, but they are fresh."

The Gypsy stowed them in her begging sheet and left the cottage, followed by Betsy. They passed slowly up the street, calling at several houses on the way. The old woman told two fortunes, while Betsy chaffered over her small stock of pins, needles, tapes and laces. Beyond the village they overtook the men sitting smoking in the hedge while the donkeys grazed along the roadside; Syforella mounted again, Betsy resumed her place beside her and their march was continued.

"Why did the children run away from us, daia?"

"They fear the witchcraft of the old woman. One of their number I have cured of a wasting sickness. They have seen my power turned to good account and fear to cross my path lest they should anger me and the same power be turned upon them for evil."

"How didst thou cure the child, daia?"

"By means of one of the most healing medicines in the world."

"Tell me of it."

"Chu, wouldst thou pretend to knowledge? Well,

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I will tell thee, daughter. It was with ash spittle, that blessed medicine which combines the magic power of the rowan with the virtue of the ass who bears our Lord's cross upon his back, and it is prepared thus: Gather an armful of ash leaves and give them to a donkey to eat, and as he chews them wipe the green froth and spittle from his mouth with a clean rag or a piece of white paper. Store the rag or paper and, when thou wouldst use it, soak a small piece in flour and water—or, better, milk—and bathe the afflicted part. Thou didst see the clean and healthy child; last year she was very weak and was covered with a loathsome disease."

"The ash is very marvellous, daia."

"It is one of our dear Lord's best gifts," said the old woman solemnly.

In two days' time they reached the well at Glan-y-Mor. It bubbled in the midst of a flat grassy space, which extended for some two or three miles along the sea-shore; inland rose huge hills, Plinlimmon towering behind them. There was no farm near the well; the men let loose the donkeys to forage for themselves upon the short grass and set up three tiny tents for shelter. Syforella soaked some cloths in the well and bound them about her back and head. All the next day she spent crouched near the spring, re-soaking her cloths at intervals. Upon the third day she declared her pains banished and her intention of resuming business on the morrow.

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On the following morning she and Betsy set out with their baskets.

They climbed steadily upwards for a couple of hours, transacting business at isolated farms upon their way, and at midday reached a little mining village where the cottages were crowded closely together. Syforella selected one and knocked; as there was no response she pushed open the door and entered the kitchen. It was close and hot, a woman lying in bed was the only occupant; she looked rather frightened by the old woman's peremptory knock and entrance. Betsy, behind her mother-in-law, smiled reassuringly at her.

"Thou art ill," said the old woman, "and wouldst know thy fate; I can tell thee all."

"There is no fortune in store for me," answered the woman gloomily; "I withstood a man's desire for me and so he laid his curse upon me, and here I have lain for many years and here I will lie until I am carried away in my coffin."

An older woman and a couple of girls came into the room.

"Wouldst thou be cured?" asked Syforella, gazing fixedly at the sufferer.

"By our Heavenly Father, yes, indeed, but I have tried all remedies and now I know that naught will break the curse."

"I can cure thee."

"God's truth? If thou dost I will give thee all I possess."

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"Give me that gown," pointing to one of red and black flowered silk that was hanging before the fire.

"My dress," said the older woman, coming forward, "my best dress that I had brought out in readiness for the wedding to-morrow; no, thou canst not have that."

Syforella turned to depart.

"Stay, stay!" cried the invalid. "Oh, do not go away; we will give thee aught else thou dost desire."

"That gown is all that I desire," answered the old woman firmly, as she reached the door.

"For pity's sake stay! Kate, Kate," screamed the woman, "give it to her, for the love of God, give it!"

Betsy almost wept in sympathy with her despair, but the old woman stood unconcernedly in the doorway while the wrangle continued. Presently a man entered and took part in the dispute, and at last the dress was brought to the Gypsy, who examined it carefully before rolling it up and concealing it in her begging sheet. Then she beckoned to Betsy and turned to go.

"The cure," cried the woman, "thou must cure me!"

"I have promised, all will be performed. I will come to thee in the morning."

The next day Syforella and Betsy went again to the mining village, taking a bottle of water from the well at Glan-y-Mor with them. The little kitchen was crowded with friends and neighbours who had come to witness the cure, but the Gypsy quickly turned them all out into the street. Then she bathed her patient

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with the well-water and bound cloths dipped in it around her head.

"It is only water?" asked the woman.

"Yes, water, but blessed water that has power to break the curse; have trust in it and thou wilt be well; I will treat thee again in three days' time."

Betsy carried several bottles of water up to the mining village, and before they left the neighbourhood the cure promised by the old woman was complete.

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CHAPTER XXV

THE HELL-HOUNDS

"MAKE up the fire, girl," said Syforella.

It was late one cheerless autumn evening. Syforella, her daughter Rosaina and her daughters-in-law, Betsy and Maria, were sitting close around a fire in the open field, sheltered from the blustering wind by a canvas screen. Upon the fire, needing occasional attention, were some stew-pots and kettles, preparations for the supper to be eaten when the men returned from the village inn, whither they had gone with harps and fiddles.

Betsy arose, threw an armful of sticks on the fire, and resumed her seat cross-legged upon the ground. She did not yet sit with the grace and ease of a tent-born Gypsy, but she was "coming to their ways" and did not miss a chair so much as in the first weeks of her married life.

The old woman removed her short black pipe from her lips and spat into the fire.

"Put aside thy needle, daughter," she commanded Rosaina, "thou wilt injure thy eyes."

Rosaina obediently folded up the apron she was making, pulled out a little pipe and rammed in some tobacco.

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"Tell us a story, daia; it will be long before the men return."

But the old woman continued to smoke in silence, staring into the fire, raking over the cinders with a stick.

"Talk, Shanny," said Rosaina; "it is a fearsome night—listen to the wind. Dost mind the night a year ago, Maria, an evening just like this it was, that we heard the hell-hounds up by Llanberis pool?"

Maria shivered. "Aye, I remember; I can see now the poor men and the horses all blown to bits."

Betsy crouched nearer to the fire for comfort.

"Dear God! did you in truth hear the hell-hounds?"

"We did," said Rosaina. "It was a fine night, windy like this; there was no moon, but the stars were shining, hard, bright specks of light among the clouds. We were all sitting round a splendid fire outside a barn, laughing and talking just as usual, when suddenly one of the men, Charley it was, held up his hand and cried, 'Hush, mates, listen; do you hear the dogs? A great pack of them is somewhere hereabouts.' 'Thou talkest nonsense, boy,' laughed the old man. 'There are no dogs here, unless thou thyself art one.' But he was mistaken, for as he spoke he and we all heard them yelping, 'wouf, wouf,' far away in the distance, and the sound came towards us, 'wouf, wouf,' as it were in the wind, and it grew louder as it seemed to pass in a cloud over our heads, and our blood ran cold, we none of us could move for fear, it was such a ghastly noise, until at last it died away behind the hills. And then

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amid a great silence we all fell upon our knees. 'Dear God,' we prayed, 'be with us; it is the hell-hounds.' And the old woman said, 'They foretell a great misfortune upon someone; please God it be not upon us.' In the morning the gauje also were talking of misfortune, for they too had heard the hell-hounds and were afraid. And in truth a great disaster followed. The next day, two carts passing through the village loaded with powder for the quarries caught fire and exploded; it was as though the earth and the sky were opened, and when quiet fell and we had recovered our senses, we saw the road was all strewed over with little bits of the men and the horses and carts."

"The poor men!" said Maria. "Do not speak of such deathly things, Rosie vach, it frightens me."

But Betsy showed a terrified interest and continued the discussion.

"Dost think that the hell-hounds really came to foretell the men's death?"

"What else?" said the old woman. "They were their death warning. Death is always foretold, though often the gauje are too stupid to read the token aright."

"I heard of a man who saw his own funeral," volunteered Betsy, proud of having a story also to relate. "He heard a tramping in the dark. When he went to the window he saw a coffin being carried up the road, and his own brother and his friends following it. The next day he took to his bed, in a week he was dead, and his coffin was carried up the road just as he had seen it."

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"Yes," said the old woman, "a phantom funeral, that is as the gauje see it always; but the little people themselves sometimes warn us—dost remember the night before Loverin's death, daughter?"

"Daudi, can I ever forget it!"

Betsy crouched ever nearer to the fire. "Tell me, Rosie."

"It happened years ago when I was a little girl, but I remember as if it had been yesterday. A large number of us were staying by a farm called Glan-y-Morfa, near Towyn. Old Billy Wood and Gypsy Mary and their son Loverin were amongst us. One evening we were sitting all together in front of the barn where we were lodging; the sun was going down into the sea in a dull red haze. There was a great marsh before us, where sheep were feeding. Suddenly Billy moved to the side of the lane. 'Take off your hats, mates,' he said, 'here come some bearing the dead.' Then we all heard the tramp of feet and the solemn chanting of a funeral hymn, and many, though not I, saw the bier and the bearers and moved aside from their way. They passed down the lane. 'What will they do with the dead yonder?' whispered one of our women, and we all wondered, for the lane ended with a gate on to the marsh; there was no graveyard in that direction. As the woman was speaking, a thick dark mist hid the gate from us, and when it lifted again the lane was empty; those who had seen before saw the procession no more. And the dull red haze was still about the

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setting sun and the sheep were feeding quietly and unafraid upon the marsh. 'It was a funeral of the Tylwyth Teg,' said one, and we all feared and muttered of a coming death. Then at last someone stirred the fire and called for supper, and we went about the work of ordinary life again. The next day we moved on. Thou dost know the town of Aberdyfi and how the road from Towyn enters it beside the estuary of the Dyfi. As we came within sight of the town we overtook a crowd following four men who carried a door with a body, the face covered by a coat, stretched upon it, and on the body sat Loverin's pet poll-parrot, and it was calling out, over and over again, 'Mizhiben, mizhiben, chavolen.' For it was Loverin lying dead upon the door—drowned. He had preceded us earlier in the day, and as it was a hot morning must have gone bathing in the treacherous estuary. And Gypsy Mary went mad—mad she is to this day—and I can still see Billy sitting in the barn we had occupied, scraping, scraping away where his dead boy had carved his name and a picture of his parrot and other things upon the wall, for none of the old people would ever leave about the tracks of the hands of our dead."

There was a long silence; then Maria began to whisper:

"I—I saw a warning before my first child died."

"What didst thou see?" whispered Betsy.

"A gaujo's death candle."

"Then it was for the gaujo's death; what had that to do with your baby?"

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"I saw it, and my baby died."

"Was it travelling along the road to the churchyard?"

"Not when I saw it; I will tell thee. We were living for the winter in a house in a little street in Pwllheli; my first child was a year old, a fine boy running about. One dark evening I stood in our door to watch for Reuben, I had his supper waiting for him, and there in the opposite doorway I saw two naked feet with a lighted candle between them. 'Mrs. Masson, Mrs. Masson!' I called, running across the street, for I thought that one of her children was playing tricks with a candle; but as I reached the door the feet and the candle vanished and everything was dark, and at the same moment I heard a shriek from upstairs, and Mrs. Masson came running down, crying out that Mr. Masson was dead. 'Dear God, have mercy,' prayed I, 'for I have seen the corpse candle.' And when I returned to our own house I looked out over the fields behind, and saw my little boy, clad all in white, running along the top of a hedge. I fell upon the floor and there Reuben found me, and he laughed at my fears, for our boy was well and sleeping peacefully. But that night he fell into convulsions, and before the morning he was dead." Maria buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

"Hisht, girl, hisht," said the old woman, "the dear Lord has taken thy boy, and all is well with him, for thou didst see him as a blessed angel upon the hedge."

There was a few moments' silence, then Rosaina stood up and yawned. "Daudi, the men are late to-

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night." Betsy pushed some more sticks beneath the kettle. "I wonder what keeps them; the inn should have been closed long since."

At last they heard the gate opened and shut again, and old Henry, with his two sons, crossed the field into the circle of firelight. As Howell sat down heavily, Betsy cried out:

"What is the matter? Thou hast hurt thyself."

His face was badly cut and bruised, and he leant forward, nursing his right arm.

"The boy has been fighting," the old man answered for him; "he had a dispute with a gaujo in the inn, and words followed words, until at last the gaujo arose and, turning his mug mouth downwards upon the table, strode outside; so the boy followed, accepting the challenge given in the gaujikano fashion—and they fought. Truly it was a good fight, and he beat the gaujo to the ground, though not before he himself had received punishment. Is not supper ready, wife? I at least am hungry, and I'll warrant me that Howell can still find his mouth amid the swelling on his face."

"Surely," said Howell; then, noticing Betsy's look of concern, he added sullenly, "Give me my supper, Shanny; thou lookest as if hadst never seen a swollen face in thy life before. I beat the gaujo well," he added, in a satisfied tone. "He will not bandy words with me again."

Betsy longed to ask the cause of the dispute, but Howell was so sullen and irritable that she did not dare to question him, and the rest of the family seemed incurious.

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CHAPTER XXVI

THE HOCHIWITCHES

BETSY was sitting by the fire one afternoon when Roddy, Reuben's six-year-old son, ran up to her.

"There are some hochiwitches coming up the lane."

"Well, be off and catch one for supper," she answered.

"Dinili gauji!" scoffed the boy. "I am not a half-breed like thee, to call dear little Ukika Woods by such a name."

"Right, sonny," said Howell, who was standing by, "teach thy Aunty Betsy the true tongue. But are there really English Gypsies in the lane?"

"Sure," answered Roddy, "and they have three great wagons that most fill the lane, and a whole drove of horses."

"Curse them, what do they want in our circuit?"

Henry and Reuben came and sat down by the fire.

"We would not have allowed them to come anear us in my father's days," the old man said sadly. "But times have changed, times have changed, and we have changed with them. Go down, boy," addressing Reuben, "and see where they mean to stay. Do not let them come too near us. Wife," to the old woman, who just then appeared from the far side of the barn, "some English Gypsies are coming here."

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Syforella, who had newly returned from hawking, sat down by the fire and lit her pipe before she replied.

"Keep in the children and the girls," she then said, "we do not wish them to be colloguing with that breed."

Betsy made up the fire and began to prepare the evening meal. After half an hour Reuben returned.

"It is Solomon and Black Sarah and their gang, and some of the Lockes," he said gloomily; "they are staying down by the river."

"Do not let them come near us," said the old woman viciously, "nasty dirty lot."

"I suspect that they are going to phuv the graia," went on Reuben still more gloomily, "in Farmer Vaughan's field."

"Curse them," said the old man again. "They bring us all into ill repute with their thieving ways." He grew excited. "Who grudged a bite of grass from the roadside for our dear little donkeys, or a few sticks from the hedge to boil our kettle? But they—they tear down whole hedges and turn their horses into the best fields at night without permission asked, and deny the damage in the morning, so that now the same farmer who used to offer to let our donkeys run with his cows, scowls when we come to beg a mouthful of grass for them."

Howell sprang to his feet. "I will send them off," he cried. "Why should they come here?"

"Nay, boy," commanded the old man. "Sit down

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again and rest quiet; the road is free to all, the magistrate will blame us if there is a fight."

There was no further intercourse with the English Gypsies that evening; they remained in their encampment by the river; the Woods watched their fires from above, but no one descended the hill.

"So Solomon is here himself; out of prison for a little time, is he?" said Howell.

"He will not be out for long," remarked Rosaina; "he cannot keep himself from stealing; he is the biggest thief that ever I heard of."

"Tcha!" said the old man; "how long has he been in prison this last spell?"

"For months," answered Reuben. "It must be near a year ago that he was caught, and all for nothing. The bloody fool was crossing over Menai Bridge behind a wagon which was loaded with hampers of rabbits, and what must he do but rip open a hamper with his knife and put one of the bunnies in his pocket."

"He calls himself a Romano chal and steals a dead rabbit!" interjected Howell with scorn.

"He was caught and sent to prison," continued Reuben, "and the very day he was let out again he met his people, and they had a great realty in an inn, and what must he do but go into the kitchen and take some towels that were hanging up to dry. But the hostess found him out, with the towels in his pocket, and straight back to prison he went, without ever sleeping a night outside the walls."

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"They are a bad lot," said the old woman; "do not have any dealings with them, children."

The next afternoon Rosaina was late returning from her rounds. "I met some of the Lockes," she explained, "and stayed talking at their camp after we got back. They have two of the finest wagons I have ever seen, with beds and stoves in them."

"Admiring wagons, art thou, Rosie?" said Laija. "I believe that thou hast had a touch from the ash stick of one of their lads."

Rosaina tossed her head but made no reply, and she did not show any surprise when, an hour later, a prosperous-looking young Gypsy man came swaggering up the hill and joined the group.

"Sarshan, baw," he observed cheerily to the old man as he seated himself by the fire.

Old Henry replied morosely, while Howell scowled and the old woman ignored him. His affability, however, was proof against these rebuffs, and he was soon in the midst of an animated conversation with the girls, in which, after a time, Reuben took part.

The boy Roddy introduced a contentious subject. "There is a pig died at Farmer Vaughan's," he said.

Howell swore. "You people are at your tricks again, and have poisoned it." He seized the English Gypsy by the arm and tried to drag him to his feet. "Get up and fight or clear out of this county."

The man sprang up as Howell hit him, and returned the blow. The antagonists were fairly matched; Howell

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was the heavier and stronger of the two, but the other was much more nimble. Blood had been drawn on both sides when Howell stumbled and fell, bearing his opponent to the ground with him. The onlookers threw themselves upon the combatants and dragged them apart.

"Thou fool," said the old man bitterly to his son.

"By the way, we did not poison that pig," said Harry Locke.

Rosaina brought a pail of water and a towel, the fighters washed their faces and peace was restored.

"But you do poison pigs," persisted Roddy; he put on a knowing look. "I heard about Doovel the other day."

"Doovel is a damned blunderer," said Harry. "What did you hear about him?"

"He gave the pig some sort of drab in a baked potato," said Roddy, speaking in English, "an' the next morning he went up to the farm to beg for the body. 'Morning, mam,' says he in his sharp English way; 'beautiful morning, ain't it?' 'And indeed it is a beautiful morning.'" Roddy here imitated the Welsh woman's English speech. "'Do you want to buy any baskets?' asked Doovel. 'No, I don't fancy that I want any to-day.' 'It is a fine pig that you've got in that sty,' said Doovel, very cunning-like. 'Yes, an' indeed it is a beautiful pig,' said the woman. 'Pity he's dead,' said Doovel. 'You might give me his skin for to make me a new tambourine, ting, ting,' and he jingled his tambourine and jumped, like this," and Roddy danced a few steps. "'The pig ain't dead yet,' said the woman.

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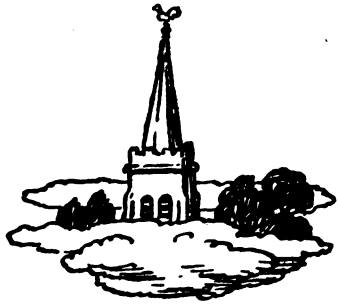
So summat went wrong with Doovel's drab that time, but that isn't what generally happens, is it?"

"Oh, I don't know," Harry answered him. "Drabbing baulos isn't so common as you seem to think, my son."

"We were welcome everywhere before you came into Wales," said the old man bitterly, "but then the farmers knew that they could trust us. I always told the children that if they found so much as an egg they must take it straight up to the house."



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CHAPTER XXVII

BETSY'S FIGHT

BETSY was feeling very happy. She and Howell were staying for the winter months in one small room at the back of a large house in Carnarvon which was tenanted chiefly by Gypsies. Howell was in bed quite lame from rheumatism, but he was, Betsy felt with relief, at any rate safe, and could not get into any more trouble or quarrels at the kirchima. That morning her brother had met her and, hearing about Howell and realising that he was unable to work, had sent her a sack of flour. So she sat on the floor kneading some bread and singing merrily; in two months she expected her third child to be born.

Suddenly the door was violently opened and Maria, who was staying in the room above them, burst in, her face almost black with rage. "Such a noise," she exclaimed. "Can't you let people have a little rest and quiet!" She had a stick in her hand and hit Betsy on the back of her head, so that she fell forward on the dough, cutting her forehead and bruising her face on the edge of the pan-mug. Howell sprang out of bed with an oath, and men and women who had followed Maria in her furious descent downstairs crowded into the

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room. Amongst them was Betsy's brother, who had been leaving the house. Whilst the others shouted and talked he seized Betsy's arm. "Have you got hold of her?" he called to other men at the door, in whose grasp Maria was struggling.

"Come," he said to Betsy, "we'll go to the magistrate at once."

One of the women came forward and attempted to wash Betsy's face and make her more presentable, but her brother interposed.

"No," he said, "you must come as you are."

So he led Betsy, blinded by her swollen eyes, to the police court, which was sitting. As they went out of the house Harry caught Betsy's arm. "Don't forget our little children," he said. "Maria must come back to look after them."

The magistrate took a serious view of the occurrence, but this Betsy refused to do. "She was annoyed and ill and tired. I don't want to do anything against her."

"Is that true?" asked the magistrate.

"Yes," said Betsy.

So Maria was bound over to keep the peace, she and Betsy shook hands, and the case was dismissed. They went out of the court and down the road arm in arm, but no sooner had they turned the corner than Maria dropped Betsy's arm.

"Machka," she said, and turned up another road.

Her brother came up to Betsy. "Why did you do such a damn silly thing?" he said.

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"I was thinking of her little children," answered Betsy.

. . . . . .

In two months Betsy's child was born. When she was quite well again she went out to look for Maria. She met her near Menai Bridge. "Will you hold my baby for a few minutes?" she said to a woman who was standing by.

She gave her basket and shawl to another woman, and then she turned to have it out with Maria.

Her long black hair came down at the first touch, so Betsy at once had a firm hold of her, and there was never any doubt about the result of the fight.

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CHAPTER XXVIII

MARRIAGE OF ROSAINA TO HARRY LOCKE

A MONTH later they camped in a field beside the railway station in Corwen, where they were joined by Harry Locke. The old people did not welcome him, but Rosaina seemed pleased and showed no surprise at his advent. She spent the greater part of the day in his company and held long conversations with her mother; and then one dull and cloudy evening, when they were gathered round the fire, she spoke:

"For how long hast thou to remain in one place, Betsy, before thou canst be married in the church?"

"Three weeks."

"We will stay here for three weeks then, daia," said Rosaina. "Wilt go to the rashai, Harry, and tell him of our wish that he should wed us?"

"Marriage, marriage," grumbled the old woman. "Get away, girl, with thy marry, marry; remember old Amos Price."

"Amos Price!" said Rosaina scornfully.

"Yes, indeed, girl, better his method than these newfangled fashions of a church and a gaujikano rashai; there is no word of such marriages in the Bible. You cannot be bound more surely than you

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are after you have promised according to our old Romani Law."

"Who was Amos Price?" asked Harry lazily, in his broken English Romani; he followed the old woman's rapid perfect speech in the Gypsy tongue with difficulty.

"He was a true kaulo; there are but few of his like left nowadays."

"And his marriage?"

"For a ceremony he cut his wrist and let the blood flow into a cup and gave it to his wife to drink, and then he drank her blood."

Rosaina shivered. "Ough, dai, do not speak of such a savage custom!"

"It was a true bond, daughter; there would be a heavy curse on whoso broke that blood tie. And dost remember Johnny Cooper?"

"Did he drink his wife's blood?"

"He did not, but after they had promised each other, he snipped a piece from off her ear."

"Dorde!" cried Rosaina, startled. "Why?"

"To mark her as his wife."

"Well, I would not like to lose a piece of my ear; I had rather remain all my life unwed."

"Folk do queer things," remarked Howell. "Jack Herne's divorce was the bloodiest thing I ever heard of."

"Jack Herne's divorce; what was that?" asked Harry.

"In his rage when he found that his wife had run away and left him, he took a chopper and chopped off the forefinger of his left hand, and as the blood dripped

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he swore that it made a division for ever between them. He kept the finger, too, as a token, and carried it always about with him in his pocket, wrapped up in salt in an old handkerchief."

"He married a second time, did he not?"

"Aye, and he gave the finger to his second wife; I suppose she has it yet."

"How horrid!" said Rosaina. "Do not forget to go to the rashai, Harry."

Despite her mother's wishes Rosaina kept the whole family at Corwen for another three weeks. She and Betsy attended the parish church each Sunday, where she listened with pride to the reading of her banns.

The wedding itself was a very gorgeous ceremony. The bride was resplendent in a red silk frock; round her neck were two heavy coral necklaces; she was also adorned with several gold bangles and finger-rings. The bridegroom wore a new suit of green velveteens; his hat was decorated with a peacock's feather. The church was crowded with gauje, and a large contingent of the Lockes were present, as well as nearly all the bride's family. But old Ellen, the phuri dai, was not there; she strongly disapproved both of the marriage to an English kaulo and of the gaujikano ceremony. Syforella also disapproved, but she had been brought to accept Harry as a son-in-law and accepted the ceremony with him.

A feast in the inn followed, but it was not so lively as Betsy's marriage feast. The rashai and his wife were

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bidden and they accepted the invitation. Their presence cast a decorous dullness over the company. Instead of being carried on until late at night it was all over early in the afternoon, as the Woods, tired of their enforced stay in Corwen, set out again on their travels the same day.

They were accompanied by Harry and Rosaina; the bridegroom, casting off his own people, joined his wife's family. He proved himself a successful horse-breaker and was unrivalled at camouflaging a horse; he was even conversant with some tricks unknown to his own relations. Altogether he was an accession to the tribe, but his admittance broke up the exclusiveness of the Welsh Gypsy clan.

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CHAPTER XXIX

CHRISTMAS

It was Christmas week, and dry, clear, frosty weather. The ground rang hard and crisp beneath the feet, the sun shone brilliantly overhead, the air was like champagne. The Gypsies in their winter quarters, crowded in tiny cottages in Carnarvon, felt the call and responded. Syforella and her compeers remained by the fireside, but a party of the younger generation took to the road. Their courage in breaking with the tradition of sheltering within four walls during the winter was rewarded; the frost held and the sun continued to shine, so that for those in perfect health—

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and no weaklings had joined the party—tramping over the frozen country was a physical delight.

From a business point of view also the venture was successful. The spirit of Christmastide was abroad; the Gypsies were everywhere welcomed with hospitality and found eager customers for the contents of their baskets, for their music and, above all, for divination. Their spirits rose high and they sang and joked with each other as they wandered in groups of two or three together about the countryside. At nightfall, when the whole party were reunited around a blazing fire in the open, or in some barn, the sound of their festivity could be heard afar, and the music and merrymaking lasted until late into the night.

Betsy and Howell, with their two little girls, were of the adventurous band, and Betsy, being the oldest woman of the party, found herself in the unwonted position of leader. On the morning of Christmas Eve she called young Dolphus and his wife to her.

"Let us go together to Brynlas. Take thy harp, Dolphus; Bena and I will take our baskets. It is a long tramp, but it is a large farm far from the high-roads; we will have a grand welcome there and do much business."

"I caution you," said Howell, when he heard the plan; "it is a long walk over the mountain and the sky looks like a change at last."

But the sun was shining, so they ridiculed his warning and set out.

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Until midday all went well. They called at cottages along the road, Dolphus playing on his harp for the inmates, while Betsy and young Bena told fortunes and sold pins and laces and bits of sweet-smelling sandal-wood. After a brief rest and a drink of tea offered to them by one of their clients, they left the road for the open hillside, and now they saw that heavy clouds were gathering before the sun.

"Let us hasten," said Dolphus, "snow is coming."

As he spoke, the storm burst with a suddenness that was almost stunning. The heavens, as it seemed, opened and heaped snow upon them. In one moment the whole landscape was blotted out and they were enclosed by what looked like a solid wall of falling snow, while they themselves became three white figures walking on a soft white counterpane. Eyes and ears were muffled by the heavy flakes and they staggered blindly on, cumbered by the weight of their saturated clothes, their feet squelching in their sodden boots.

"Oof," panted Bena, "are we near the farm?"

"I do not quite know," Betsy answered. "It cannot be much farther, I think."

She was right. After plodding painfully on for another quarter of an hour they heard dogs barking, found a gate and stumbled up the path to the door of the farmhouse. Their appearance in the kitchen was greeted with shouts of delight by the farm servants, while the farmer himself and his wife welcomed them heartily. They were soon drinking hot tea and drying them-

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selves before a roaring fire, while the maids inspected the contents of their baskets, fortunately preserved by waterproof covers. Then came the demand for fortune-telling, which Betsy and Bena satisfied in separate corners of the huge kitchen, while Dolphus entertained the whole company with his harp.

"Dolphus, see if it still snows," said Betsy, after a couple of hours had passed in this way. "It grows late and we have far to go."

"It snows heavily," said the farmer, "and it is as black as hell; you cannot move to-night."

"Can we not? Will you then give us shelter in one of your barns, sir?"

"It is too cold to sleep in the barn; go into the old kitchen, it is warm; the maids have been boiling potatoes there all day; I will send you some rugs."

As the evening grew late the snow fell, if possible, more and more heavily; all the animals fed and bedded and the last farmyard duties performed for the night, the men and boys crowded into the kitchen and the whole population of the farmstead, human and canine, gathered around the fire. The Gypsies were honoured guests. To the music-loving people Dolphus and his harp were a godsend. Sometimes he would play jigs and reels and the company would dance, but more often he played old songs, when men and women, sitting as near the blazing fire as they could get, sang lustily, so that the old farmhouse echoed with their voices. As Christmas Day drew near all joined in carols; at twelve

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o'clock they knelt together while the farmer prayed aloud, expressing their thankfulness for the birth of Christ.

"They are good pious people," said Betsy, as the three Gypsies spread their rugs beside the dying fire in the old kitchen.

"Oh, I do not know," rejoined Bena, "many of the girls wanted me to promise them things that were not pious."

"Anyway, they have done well for us," remarked Dolphus. "My pockets are full, and you women must have made a fortune."

"I am tired of them," yawned Bena. "Tell us one of thy stories, Betsy."

Betsy had acquired the habit of romancing. To her active busy brain it seemed dull to repeat the old folk-tales over and over again without variation, as was done by old Ellen and the other valued raconteurs of the tribe; she preferred to annex incidents from their enormous storehouse of tales and string them on a plot of her own devising. She snuggled more closely into her blanket and began.

"Once I went out hawking alone, and was making my way leisurely over the mountain, when I came to a lonely cottage. I knocked, an old woman came and I asked for a drink of milk. I said, 'Hast seen two girls go along this way to-day?' for I thought to rejoin my companions. 'I saw them,' answered the old hag; 'they went through that gate.' She shut the door,

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leaving me on the step. I went on for a mile through a beautiful valley until I came to a pretty little house. The sun was hot and I was tired, for I had walked far that day. I heard someone laughing. I looked about me and found a manikin sitting under a great stone, so I asked him if he had seen the two girls. 'Take my hand,' said the old greybeard, 'I cannot rise alone. If thou wilt put me on thy shoulder and carry me to that gate I will tell thee where the girls are.' I lifted him on to my shoulder and there he remained; I could not induce him to leave me. I carried this devilish old man all the day and all the night; he clasped my neck and his feet were like a whip upon my belly, and thus I carried him for years. At last I came back to the old crone—they were brother and sister. I knocked and she opened the door. 'So thou hast returned. I am glad to see thee; put my brother down now.' 'But I cannot put him down.' She touched him with a rod; down he fell. He looked at me and I at him. 'Thou hideous old man,' said I. 'Thou art down now; never will I lift thee again.' The old hag opened the door for me. 'Be off; thou hast done a great kindness to my brother by carrying him up from the valley to me. Look over thy left shoulder and thou wilt see what thou hast done for him.' I looked. There stood the handsomest young man I had ever seen. He said, 'Thou hast broken a heavy curse that was laid upon me. Take this rod and strike the stone beneath thy feet with it; thou wilt find thyself in thy own land and never again

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wilt thou be in poverty.' I struck the stone. I felt myself lifted from my feet, and I was borne away I knew not whither, until at last I was left in a beautiful field where all my people were haymaking, and when I put my hand in my pocket I found it full of gold."

When the Gypsies awoke on Christmas morning they looked out upon a dazzling virgin-white world; during the night the snow had ceased, it was now freezing hard and the sun shone brilliantly.

"Make haste to get up," cried Betsy. "No more business to-day; we have done well, and I long to rejoin my people."

"Isha daudi, it is cold," grumbled Bena, but Betsy had already hurried away.

The inmates of the farm had dispersed to get through the necessary farmyard work as fast as possible, before beginning the revels appropriate to the day; but a couple of girls, left in the kitchen to begin the preparation of the Gargantuan Christmas feast, made tea and breakfast for the Gypsies, who refused a cordial invitation to stay and share the day's good cheer.

"We must return to our people," said Betsy, "my little children are looking for me."

So, laden with tokens of the mistress's goodwill in the shape of bacon, butter and eggs, as well as a share of mince-pies and Christmas fare, they set off in high spirits on their long tramp.

"I would send a trap to take you over the mountain," said the farmer, "but the snow is too deep for the horses."

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The snow was deep. When they neared the crest of the mountain they sank above their knees at every step. Heavily laden as they were, their progress was slow and laborious. But they had made a successful trip and the sun shone. So, tired, wet and draggled though they were, they could still joke and look light-heartedly upon their discomforts. When at last they left the mountain paths for the high-road they were able to walk briskly, and late in the afternoon they reached the field where, in a great barn, the Gypsies were encamped.

It was the scene of great bustle and activity. Before the barn door, sheltered by a screen of sacking, three huge fires were burning fiercely; here the women were cooking great plenty; turkeys, geese and pork were roasting on spits before the fire, great plum-puddings were boiling, potatoes and other accompaniments were being prepared. The men were basking in the warmth of the fires smoking, some of the boys were playing on the fiddle, children were running about in great excitement.

Shouts of welcome greeted the returned wanderers, who flung down their burdens and squatted beside the fire.

"It is good to be back again," said Betsy. "It was a long, weary tramp, but it was well worth the trouble."

She handled the fat pocket beneath her apron with satisfaction as little Ellen crept on to her lap.

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